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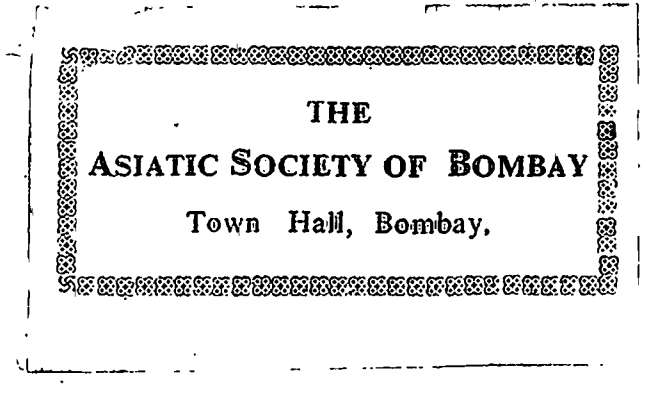

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vol. III

THEOLOGY,

EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED,

IN

A SERIES OF SERMONS:

BY

TIMOTHY DWIGHT, S. T. D. LL. D.

[redacted] YALE COLLEGE.

WITH

A Memoir

OF

THE [illegible] OF THE AUTHOR.

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SERMON LXX.

REGENERATION.

THE AGENT IN EFFECTING IT. THE HOLY GHOST. HIS CHARACTER.

Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. TIT. iii. 5.

IN the six preceding sermons, I have considered *the manner in which we become interested in the redemption of Christ, through free grace on the part of God, and on our part by evangelical faith. The manner in which we become possessed of this faith,* is the next great subject of investigation in a system of theology.

The text, after denying that we are saved by works of righteousness, and declaring that our salvation is according to the mercy of God, or through his free grace, asserts, *that this salvation is accomplished by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.*

There has been no small dispute among divines about the meaning of *the third phrase* in this passage, *the washing of regeneration.* Some have supposed it to denote *baptism;* and some to denote *the same thing with the following phrase, the renewing of the Holy Ghost:* others have interpreted it in other manners. The second interpretation which I have mentioned, is, in my apprehension, the true one. If *baptism* be intended, the passage is equivalent to the declaration of our Saviour to Nicodemus; *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* He is *born of water,* or baptized indispensably in order to his admission into the *visible* kingdom of God; and *of the Spirit,* indispensably also, in order to his admission into the *invisible* and *eternal* kingdom of God. As his admission into the former is a symbol of his admission into the latter;

so *baptism*, the means of his admission into the former, is a symbol of *regeneration*, the means of his admission into the latter. The difference between the two interpretations which I have specified, will therefore be found ultimately to be immaterial: the one referring the phrase to the *type*, and the other to the *thing typified*. On either scheme, it must be admitted, that *the apostle declares mankind to be saved by regeneration. Regeneration is therefore that event in the gracious providence of God, by which we become the subjects of faith, entitled to justification, and consequently heirs of salvation.*

In the consideration of this subject, two things are in the text presented to our inquiry:

I. *The Agent of this work;* and,

II. *The work itself.*

The *Agent* in the work of renewing the human mind is declared in this passage to be the HOLY GHOST. Two things are naturally presented to us by the mention of a person sustaining so important a part in the economy of salvation; a part, without which all that has preceded would be wholly defective, and exists to no valuable purpose,

I. *His character;* and,

II. *His agency.*

The former of these shall now engage our attention; and my own views concerning it will be sufficiently expressed in this position.

The Holy Ghost is a divine person.

It is well known to those who hear me, that various classes of men who profess to receive the Bible as the rule of their faith, have denied this proposition; *viz.* those who deny the Deity of our Saviour. The scheme of denial, however, has in this case been materially different from that in the other. In *that*, Deity was the object denied; in *this*, personality. On all hands it is agreed, that the Holy Ghost is acknowledged by Trinitarians to be a *divine person;* but by Unitarians only a *divine attribute;* asserted sometimes to be *the wisdom*, but usually *the power* of God. The chief subject of debate, therefore, between us and the Unitarians; that is, those with whom *we* have the chief concern; *viz.* the Arians and Socinians; is, whether the Holy Ghost be a

person or an attribute. In support of the Trinitarian doctrine concerning this subject, I observe,

1st. *The supposition that the Spirit of God is an attribute renders the language of the Scriptures unintelligible and unmeaning.*

I have had occasion to take some notice of this fact formerly: it will be proper, however, to bring it up to view at this time. For example then, it is said in Acts x. 38, *God anointed Jesus with the Holy Ghost and with power.* This passage, read according to its real meaning, as interpreted by the Unitarians, would stand thus, *God anointed Jesus with the holy power of God and with power.* Rom. xv. 13, *Now the God of peace fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost:* that is, *that ye may abound in hope through the power of the holy power of God.* Ver. 19, *Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God;* that is, *mighty signs and wonders by the power of the power of God.* 1 Cor. ii. 4, *In demonstration of the Spirit and of power;* that is, *in demonstration of power and of power.*

I will not intrude upon your patience by repeating similar passages any farther, as these are abundantly sufficient for my purpose. It cannot be necessary to bring proofs, that the infinitely wise God can never have directed his own word to be written in this manner. No *sober man* ever wrote in this manner. Nay, it may be confidently asserted, that such a mode of writing was never adopted by *any man of any character whatever.*

2dly. *This scheme renders our Saviour's account of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost unmeaning and incredible.*

This account is given us in various places; particularly Matt. xii. 31, *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.* Concerning this I observe,

1st. *That blasphemy cannot be directed against an attribute.* Evil speaking, or speaking in a manner derogatory to character, can be directed only against a *perciplent being;* because such a being only is capable of perceiving, or being in any way affected by, the evil intended. When

mankind speak evil against the word, sabbaths, ordinances, works, names, or titles, of God, the evil is nothing, except as it is directed against God himself; because he alone, and not the things immediately blasphemed, can perceive, or be affected with, the evil which is spoken. In this manner all men have understood the subject.

It cannot be therefore, that the Unitarians, when they read this passage, supposed the blasphemy in question to be directed against *the power of God:* they undoubtedly consider it as directed against God himself, through the medium of this attribute. I observe therefore,

2dly. *It is inconceivable, that blasphemy against God universally, and in all other forms, should be forgiven; while the blasphemy against his power can never be forgiven.*

In the attribute of power there is plainly nothing which is peculiarly sacred. It is shared alike by good and evil beings; and does not contribute at all to distinguish their character, as moral beings, or to render them either good or evil: it is in no sense the foundation, nor an ingredient, of worth or moral excellence: it is not, and cannot be, the object of love, nor praise: it is therefore incredible, and certainly inexplicable, that *all manner of blasphemy* against the whole character of God, particularly against his moral character, *should be forgiven;* and yet that blasphemy against this single, natural attribute should never be forgiven. So far as the human understanding can discern, blasphemy against the *holiness, faithfulness, truth, goodness, and mercy,* of God would be more expressive of malignant opposition and of guilt in the blasphemer than blasphemy merely against his *power*. St. John has declared, that *God is love;* that is, love is the essence, sum, and glory, of his moral character, and of himself. Blasphemy against this perfection, we should, I think, irresistibly conclude to be more heinous, than against any other attribute. But, according to this scheme, blasphemy against the power of God, a *natural attribute* is so much more heinous than that which is directed against all other divine attributes; nay, than that which is directed against God himself, and his whole character, including this very attribute of power, together with all others, as to be absolutely unpardonable; while all other blasphemy can and will be forgiven. This, to say the least, is incredible.

If the Holy Ghost be a divine person, it would seem probable, that, if any sin is incapable of being forgiven, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost would be that sin. The Holy Ghost is God, employed in his most benevolent and wonderful work; that of restoring holiness to the soul of man; in his most glorious character, that of the Sanctifier; in a work, demanding the supreme gratitude of mankind; in a character, demanding their supreme reverence and love.

3dly. *That the Holy Ghost is not an attribute is evident from Acts* v. 3. *But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost?*

A lie is a wilful deception, and can be told only to intelligent beings; because such beings only can perceive the meaning of the declaration, with which the liar intends to deceive; or, in other words, because such beings only can receive the lie at his mouth. A child perfectly knows, that he cannot lie to a tree or an ox; because they must be unconscious of what he says. But an attribute is as unconscious as a tree or an ox; and although GOD perceives all things, yet *his power* perceives nothing. A lie therefore cannot, in the physical sense of possibility, be told to the power of God.

4thly. *All the attributes and actions of a person are ascribed to the Holy Spirit.*

These are so numerous, and the varieties in which they are mentioned are so numerous also, that I shall only specify them in the most summary manner.

The Spirit of God is said *to strive. My Spirit shall not always strive with man.* Gen. vi. 3.

To be sent forth.

Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, and they are created. Psal. civ. 30. *God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son.* Gal. iv. 6. *The Comforter, whom I will send unto you from the Father.* John xv. 26.

To move.

The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. Gen. i. 2.

To know.

The Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the

spirit of a man which is within him? Even so the things of God knoweth no one, but the Spirit of God. 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11.

Here let me ask, whether any man can conceive, that *knowledge*, one essential attribute of God, can with any meaning be said to be an attribute of *power*, which is another? Or whether power can, in any words that have meaning, be said to know any thing?

The Spirit of God is said *to speak*. *He shall not speak of himself: but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.* John xvi 13.

Then the Spirit said to Peter. Acts x. 19. *The Spirit said to Philip.* Acts viii. 20. *Let him that hath an ear hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.* Rev. ii. 7. *The Spirit and the bride say come.* Rev. xxii. 17.

To guide.

He will guide you into all the truth. John xvi. 13.

To lead.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Rom. viii. 14.

To help.

The Spirit helpeth our infirmities. Rom. viii. 26.

To testify.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. Rom. viii. 16. *But when the Comforter is come, even the Spirit of truth, he shall testify of me.* John xv. 26.

To reveal.

As it is now revealed unto his holy prophets and apostles by the Spirit. Eph. iii. 5. *But the Comforter shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.* John xiv. 26.

To search.

The Spirit searcheth all things. 1 Cor. ii. 10.

To have a mind or pleasure.

He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit. Rom. viii. 27.

To prophesy.

He shall shew you things to come. John xvi. 13. *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith.* 1 Tim. iv. 1.

To intercede.

The Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings, which cannot be uttered. Rom. viii. 26.

To give gifts.

For to one is given by his Spirit the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge; to another, faith; to another, the gifts of healing; to another, the working of miracles, &c. 1 Cor. xii. 8—10.

To work in the soul of man.

All these worketh one and the same Spirit, dividing to every man as he will. 1 Cor. xii. 11.

To work miracles.

Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God. Rom. xv. 10.

To sanctify.

Ye are sanctified by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. vi. 11.

To quicken, or give life.

It is the Spirit that quickeneth. John vi. 63. *Put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.* This is spoken of Christ. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

To be pleased.

It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us. Acts xv. 28.

To be vexed.

They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit. Isa. lxiii. 10.

To be provoked, to be resisted, and to be grieved.

That all those things should be said of an attribute, particularly of the attribute of power, will, I believe, be acknowledged to be incredible. That they should be dictated by God himself, and be the common language in which this attribute, or any attribute, is described in his word, is, I think, impossible. The language of the Scriptures is in all other cases, except those in which it involves the Deity of the Son and the Spirit, the language of common sense; the plain, artless language of nature. Why should it not be so here? Why should these two cases be, uniformly and solely, exceptions to that law, by which all the remaining language of Scripture is governed? Why should the scriptural writers, whenever these subjects come before them, and *then only*, desert their native style; that which alone they use on all other occasions; and adopt one totally new and singular? Why should this be done by any writer? Such a case, it is presumed, cannot be found in the world

except in these two instances. Why should it be found in so many of these writers? Why should it be found in every scriptural writer? Why, above all, should it be found in the language of Christ himself? Still more; whence could these writers be induced to depart from their customary style, whenever they had occasion to speak of these two subjects, and adopt such language as renders their real meaning obscure; and not only obscure, but unintelligible; and not only unintelligible, but so utterly lost in the strangeness of their phraseology, that almost all their readers, and among them the great body of the wisest and best, have totally mistaken the real meaning, and derived from this very phraseology a meaning infinitely different? Can this be supposed to have been accomplished by the immediate providence of God himself, when disclosing his will to mankind concerning subjects of infinite importance? Yet the Unitarians must suppose all this, or give up their scheme.

But it is replied, that "*the language of the Scriptures is highly figurative; and that among the figures used, bold personifications hold a distinguished place. Among these, we find the attributes of God personified. For example, in the Proverbs of Solomon, particularly in the eighth chapter, we find the divine* WISDOM *represented as a living agent, possessing a variety of other attributes, and performing such actions as are elsewhere ascribed to the Spirit of God.*"

This answer is the only specious one which has been, or, it is presumed, can be, made to the arguments alleged above. I shall therefore consider it particularly; and reply,

In the first place, *that this personification of Wisdom is exhibited in animated and sublime poetry.*

In such poetry, and in the loftier strains of eloquence, we are to look, if any where, for bold figurative language. The whole tenor of the discourse here proceeds from an enkindled imagination and ardent feelings. In this state of mind, nature instinctively adopts figurative language and bold images; and readily imparts life, thought, and action, to those objects, the contemplation of which has excited the peculiar elevation. With the writer, the reader, in all such cases, readily coincides. The dullest man, in the dullest frame, easily catches the inspiration; and not only admits without hesitation the propriety of this language and these

images, but regards them as the only things which are proper, natural, and suited to the strain of thought.

But on ordinary occasions, which furnish nothing to raise the mind above its common, cool level, such a mode of writing is perfectly unnatural; is at war with the whole tenor of thought; and can be the result of nothing but an inexplicable determination to write extravagance and produce wonder. Not an example of this nature can be found in the Scriptures, unless it be this which is now in debate.

Here this language and these images are adopted, if they are in fact adopted at all, on the most ordinary occasions; inferring the most tranquil, even, uninterested, state of the writer; in the simplest narratives, and the most quiet discussions. Who would look for a personification in such instances as the following. *The Spirit said unto* PETER; *The Spirit said unto* PHILIP; *The Spirit caught away* PHILIP; *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly: It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us;* together with a vast multitude of others, exactly resembling these in their nature? If personifications are to be used in such cases, in what cases are they not to be used? And in what cases are we to use simple language?

To complete the strangeness of this representation, the Greek masculine pronouns and relatives are, in a multitude of instances, made to agree with the neuter substantive, Πνευμα, Spirit; a mode of personification, in all other cases, absurd; and here, to say the least, inexplicable.

2dly. *The Wisdom spoken of in the Proverbs, is also a real person, and not an attribute;* viz. *the Lord Jesus Christ.*

This has been the unwavering opinion of the great body of divines: of most, I believe, if not all, who are not Unitarians. Christ, as I apprehend, challenges this character to himself, Matt. xi. 19, *Wisdom is justified of her children.* St. Paul, in 1 Cor. i. 24, attributes it to him directly, when he says, *Christ the wisdom of God;* and in verse 30, when he says, *Who of God is become unto us wisdom;* and in Col. ii. 3, where he says of Christ, *In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom.*

That the attribute wisdom is not meant by Solomon, in this chapter, is completely evident from the fourteenth verse

Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom. Now it is impossible that wisdom should possess wisdom: the possessor and the thing possessed being, by physical necessity, two things, distinct from each other. It is also evident from the whole tenor of this chapter, as well as from several other parts of the discourse in the beginning of this book, particularly chap. i. 20—33; on which, however, I can dwell no longer at the present time.

3dly. *Should it be still supposed, that the attribute of wisdom, and not Christ, is intended by* SOLOMON; *the passage, even if it were not poetical, would not involve such absurdities and difficulties, as are involved in the supposition that the Holy Ghost is an attribute personified.* An extensive comparison of these two subjects cannot be expected on the present occasion: suffice it to say, that wisdom is not said *to appear in a bodily shape, is not introduced, in form, as an agent in the common concerns of life; is not spoken of by one living being, when discoursing of another living being, as a third living being, united with the other two in the transaction of real business; is never introduced in the Scriptures, in plain prose, as speaking, hearing, commanding, guiding, sanctifying, and universally doing such things, as can be attributed only to a living person:* yet it must strike every person, that, as wisdom is an attribute involving consciousness and perception, all these things, and others like them, might be attributed to it with much more propriety than to the attribute of power.

5thly. *The Holy Ghost is a divine person.*

There will probably be little dispute concerning this declaration among those who acknowledge that the Holy Ghost is a person. The things which are said concerning the Spirit of God are so plainly such, as evince infinite perfection, that few persons, probably none who admit the personality of the Spirit, will deny his Deity: still it will be useful, on this occasion, to exhibit several proofs of this truth.

(1st.) *The names of God are given to the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures.*

Now the Lord is that Spirit. 2 Cor. viii. 17. This is a direct affirmation of St. Paul, that the Spirit is God.

For who hath known the mind of the Lord? and who has been his Counsellor? Rom. xi. 34.

For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? 1 Cor. ii. 16.

Both these passages are quoted from Isa. xl. 13, *Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being, his counsellor, hath taught him?*

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ. 2 Thess. iii. 5. Here the person addressed in prayer, is plainly a distinct person from those mentioned by the names God and Christ, and of course is the Spirit of God; to whom, throughout the Scriptures, the office of directing the hearts of Christians to their duty, is every where ascribed.

Peter, Acts v. 3, 4, says to Ananias, *Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost? Why hast thou conceived this in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.* Here the Holy Ghost is called God by the apostle in as direct terms as are conceivable.

Acts iv. 24, 25, *They lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, who hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.*

Who by the mouth of thy servant DAVID *hast said, Why did the Heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?*

Acts i. 16, Peter says, *The scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost spake by the mouth of* DAVID. The Holy Ghost is therefore the Lord God who spoke by the mouth of David.

(2dly.) *The attributes of God are ascribed to the Holy Ghost.*

Eternity.—*Christ, who through the eternal Spirit once offered himself to God.* Heb. ix. 14.

Omnipresence.—*Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Whither shall I flee from thy presence?* Psal. cxxxix. 7.

Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost; that is, the bodies of all Christians. 1 Cor. vi. 9.

Omniscience.—*The Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God.* 1 Cor. ii. 10.

Even so the things of God knoweth no one, but the Spirit of God. 1 Cor. ii. 11.

Holiness.—*The Holy Ghost; the Holy Spirit; the Spirit of holiness.* Passim.

Grace.—*Hath done despite to the Spirit of grace.* Heb. x. 29. See also Zech. xii. 10.

Truth.—*The Comforter, the Spirit of truth.* John xiv. 17.

Glory.—*The Spirit of glory and of God resteth on you.* 1 Pet. iv. 14.

Goodness.—*Thy good Spirit.* Neh. ix. 20. *Thy Spirit is good.* Psal. cxliii. 10.

Power.—*The power of God,* as exerted in working signs and wonders, is ascribed to the Holy Ghost throughout the New Testament.

(3dly.) *The actions of God are ascribed to the Holy* GHOST.

Creation.—*By his Spirit he garnished the heavens.* Job xxvi. 13. *The Spirit of God hath made me.* Job xxxiii. 4: see also Acts i. 24, 25, compared with Acts i. 16.

Working miracles, which, as you know, is either a suspension or counteraction of the laws of nature, or of the divine agency operating conformably to those laws; and is therefore, with peculiar evidence, an act of God himself. This, as I have already remarked concerning the power exerted in it, is throughout the New Testament ascribed to the Holy Ghost.

Inspiration.—*Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* 2 Pet. i. 21.

Giving life.—*It is the Spirit that quickeneth.* John vi. 63. *Put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.* 1 Pet. iii. 18. *He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you,*

Sanctification.—This also is ascribed to the Holy Ghost appropriately throughout the New Testament.

Instances of the same general nature might be easily increased in numbers, and the proofs might be easily multiplied to a great extent; but as discourses, so extensively made up of detached passages of Scripture, are apt to be less interesting than could be wished, I shall desist.

(4thly.) *The Holy Ghost is a divine person, because he is united with the Father and the Son in the baptismal service, and in the blessing pronounced upon Christians by St. Paul.*

I have mentioned these subjects together, because they have some things in common: yet there are also some things in which they differ. *Go, and teach all nations,* said our Saviour to his apostles, *baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, says St. Paul to the Corinthian church, and through them to all Christians, *and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.*

In the commission here given by Christ to his apostles, it is impossible that an attribute should, with propriety or meaning, be joined with persons; or a creature with one or more divine persons. No absurdity can strike the mind with more force, than that Christ should direct the apostles to baptize *in the name of God the Father, and of the Son, and of the Divine Power.* Nothing but impiety can, so far as I see, be contained in a direction to baptize in the name of God, and of a creature. What creature would dare to associate himself with God in such an act of authority, and thus presume to ascend the throne of his Maker? The same things are equally true concerning the form of blessing above recited. Can St. Paul be supposed to have united either a creature, or an attribute, with the eternal God in this solemn service? What blessings could either of these bestow? Both the creature and the attribute considered by themselves are, in this view, nothing.

But this form of blessing is a prayer; and is addressed equally to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Can St. Paul have addressed a prayer either to an attribute, or to a creature?

Farther, the blessing prayed for from the Holy Ghost is communion, or fellowship. The request for this blessing involves therefore the declaration, that the Holy Ghost will, if the prayer be granted, be present with all those for whom this communion is supplicated, and present with that influence which is the source of spiritual and immortal life. In other words, the Holy Ghost is here exhibited as omnipresent; and as every where possessing, and at his pleasure communicating, life here, as the commencement of life hereafter.

I shall conclude this discourse with observing, that the divinity of the Spirit of Truth furnishes Christians with the most solid foundation for gratitude and joy. It will be seen, in the progress of these discourses, that he is the sum of all the moral blessings introduced into this world by the mediation of Christ. He sanctifies the soul; *brings it out of*

darkness into marvellous light; improves it in holiness; conducts it through the temptations and dangers of this life; furnishes it with every gift and grace; prompts it to all virtue and excellence; and fills it with all spiritual enjoyment. For this great work he is abundantly qualified by the possession of infinite perfection; of all that is great, and all that is good. In this world he commences and carries it on: in the future world he advances it to absolute perfection. Through the ages of eternity he will supply, enrich, and adorn, the soul with endless virtue, as the means of endless happiness and glory.

SERMON LXXI.

TESTIMONIES TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY, FROM THE ANCIENT CHRISTIANS, JEWS, AND HEATHENS.

Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me.—ISA. XLVIII. 16.

IN the last discourse I considered the *personality and divinity of the Spirit of God.* In a series of discourses, formerly delivered, I considered *the Divinity of Christ.* If the arguments alleged in those discourses are as conclusive, as they appear to me, they prove the existence of a TRINITY, or *three persons in one God.*

The proof of this doctrine must unquestionably be derived from the Scriptures alone. But, when a doctrine of this extraordinary nature is presented to the mind, we naturally feel a strong curiosity to know the manner in which the same doctrine has been regarded by others; particularly by such as have lived before us, and peculiarly by the ancient members of the Jewish and Christian churches. Nor is this a matter of mere curiosity. If the doctrine of the Tri-

nity were now first discovered by mankind to be contained in the Scriptures, the words being supposed to have remained always the same, we should undoubtedly be surprised to find that those passages, which in our view clearly contain this doctrine, had never been understood by others in the same manner as by ourselves: particularly we should be inclined to doubt the soundness of our own interpretations, if we found the Jews construing such passages in the Old Testament, and the early Christians in the New, in a manner totally different from ours. Were such the fact, we should, I think, very naturally suspect our own mode of construction: for we could not easily believe, that the Jewish church was always ignorant of this doctrine, if it was really taught by the prophets; nor the early Christian church, if it was decisively communicated by the apostles. It will be easily seen, that the *time* in which those lived, to whom an appeal of this nature is made, must be important, as well as *the character of the witnesses*. The more ancient the witnesses are, other things being equal, the more valuable must be their testimony; and such testimony, if really ancient, and at the same time explicit and decisive, cannot fail of yielding material satisfaction to every rational inquirer.

Nor is the testimony even of Heathens, concerning this subject, to be disregarded. If we find that the ancient Heathen nations generally, or in most or all instances independently of any acquaintance with the Scriptures, have holden the doctrine of a *triad constituting a monad*, that is, *a supreme God who was one in one sense, and three in another;* we cannot easily avoid the conclusion, that they derived this doctrine from a single source, and that *that* source was revelation. The doctrine plainly lies wholly out of the course, I think I may say out of the reach, of human thought. There is therefore no reason, why we should believe it to have been invented by man: much less is there any reason to suppose it invented by men, in so many different nations, and in such circumstances of barbarism, as almost preclude the invention of any philosophical doctrine. The source of the doctrine must therefore have been one; and *that* a revelation existing before these nations were separated from each other.

In the text, a person declares concerning himself, *I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God,* in the original *the Lord* JEHOVAH, *and his Spirit hath sent me.* The person, speaking in this verse, is in the second verse called *Jehovah of Hosts,* or *Jehovah God of Hosts.* And in the twelfth verse he says, *I am he; I am the first: I also am the last. Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth; my right hand hath spanned the heavens. When I call unto them, they stand up together.* The person speaking in the text, is then JEHOVAH OF HOSTS; *the first and the last; the Creator of the earth and the heavens.* And this person says, *And now the Lord* JEHOVAH *and his Spirit hath sent me;* or, more probably, *The Lord* JEHOVAH *hath sent me and his Spirit.* Origen, as quoted by bishop Lowth, comments on this passage in this manner: "Who is it that saith, in Isaiah, 'And now the Lord hath sent me and his Spirit?' in which, as the expression is ambiguous, is it the Father and the Holy Spirit who have sent Jesus? or the Father, who hath sent both Christ and the Holy Spirit? The latter is the true interpretation." This opinion of Origen appears to be just; because we no where read in the Scriptures that Christ was sent by the Spirit; but every where, that both Christ and the Spirit were sent by the Father, called in the text the LORD GOD. To the present purpose, however, this difference of interpretation is wholly immaterial. Whether the Spirit send, or be sent, he is equally determined to be a living agent; since in the physical sense it is impossible, that any other being should either send, or be sent. In the text, then, the doctrine of a TRINITY is directly declared by a person, styled JEHOVAH OF HOSTS. Let us now see what countenance this doctrine receives from the sources which I have specified above.

It will not be imagined, that in the compass of such a discourse any thing more can be done, than merely to make a moderate selection of the testimonies referred to. For those which I shall mention, I am chiefly indebted to bishop Bull, doctor Jamieson, Mr. Maurice, and the Asiatic Researches: and it is believed, that they will be sufficiently numerous and sufficiently explicit to satisfy a mind willing to receive the truth.

I. *To the pre-existence of Christ the following testimonies must, I think, be regarded as complete.*

1st. Justin Martyr, who flourished in the year 140, and was born about the close of the first century, declares Christ to have been the person who appeared to Abraham under the oak of Mamre; and asserts that the person here called LORD, or JEHOVAH, to whom Abraham prays for Sodom, and who, in the next chapter, is said to rain fire and brimstone on the *cities of the plain,* was no other than Christ. He also asserts that Christ appeared to Moses in the bush.

2dly. Irenæus, who flourished in the year 178, declares, that Christ, as God, was adored by the prophets; was *the God of the living, and the living God;* that he spoke to Moses in the bush; and that, afterward, the same person refuted the doctrine of the Sadducees concerning the resurrection of the dead. He farther says, that Abraham learned divine truth from the Logos, *or Word of God.*

3dly. Theophilus of Antioch, who flourished in the year 181, declares, that Christ, assuming το προσωπον του πατρος, the character of the Father, that is, the divine character, came to Paradise in the appearance of God, and conversed with Adam.

4thly. Clemens Alexandrinus, who flourished in the year 194, exhibits Christ as the author of the former precepts and of the latter; that is, of the Scriptures of the Old Testament and of the New; deriving both from one fountain.

5thly. Tertullian declares, that it was the Son of God who spoke to Moses, and who appeared, that is, as God, at all times; that he overthrew the tower of Babel, confounded the languages of men, and rained fire and brimstone on Sodom, and Gomorrah. He calls him *Dominus a Domino;* and he says, that he only and alway conversed with men from Adam down to the patriarchs and prophets, in visions and dreams; and that no other God conversed with men, beside the *Word, who was* afterward *to be made flesh.*

II. *That Christ was the Creator of the world, in the view of the ancient church, the following testimonies satisfactorily prove.*

1st. Barnabas, who, as you well know, was a companion of the apostles, and could not but know their views of this

subject, says, in an epistle of his yet remaining, "The sun in the heavens was the work of the Son of God."

2dly. Hermas, also a companion of the apostles, says, that "the Son of God was more ancient than any creature; seeing he was present with the Father at the creation of the world."

3dly. Athenagoras, who flourished in the year 178, says, that "by Christ, and through Christ, all things were created; since the Father and the Son are ἕν, one thing, one substance."

4thly. Justin Martyr declares, that "more than one divine person are denoted by the phrase, *The man is become as one of us;* and that one of these is Christ."

5thly. Clemens Alexandrinus says, "The Logos is the universal architect;" that is, the maker of all things. He farther says, "The Logos is the creator of men and of the world." He also speaks of the Logos as the universal Ruler and Instructor.

III. *That Christ was truly God, in the view of the ancient church, will fully appear from the following testimonies:*

1st. Clement of Rome, who was a companion of the apostles, calls Christ "the sceptre of the greatness of God," and says, "he had it in his power to have come with pomp and magnificence, but would not."

2dly. Polycarp, a disciple of St. John, when at the stake, addressed a prayer to God, which he concluded in this manner; "For all things I praise thee, I bless thee, I glorify thee, together with the eternal and heavenly Jesus Christ; with whom, unto thee, and the Holy Spirit, be glory, both now and for ever, world without end. Amen."

3dly. Justin Martyr declares, "that Christ, the *first-born Word of God,* exists as God; that he is Lord and God, as being the Son of God: and that he was the *God of Israel.*"

He also says, "We adore and love the *Word* of the unbegotten and invisible God." And again, "Him (the Father of righteousness), and *that* Son who hath proceeded from him, and the prophetical Spirit (that is, the Spirit of inspiration), we worship and adore."

This doctrine also, Trypho, his Jewish antagonist, admits as the doctrine of the Gentile Christians generally.

4thly. The church of Smyrna, in their epistle to the other churches concerning the martyrdom of Polycarp, in which the above-mentioned doxology is quoted, says, "We can never forsake Christ, nor worship any other; for we worship him as being the Son of God."

5thly. Athenagoras says, "The νους και Λογος, *mind and Word of God,* is the Son of God;" and, "We, who preach God, preach God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are One."

6thly. Tatian, bishop of Antioch, who flourished in the year 172 says, "We declare, that God was born in human form."

7thly. Melito, bishop of Sardis, who flourished in the year 177, says, "We are worshippers of one God, who is before all, and in all, in his Christ, who is truly God the eternal Word."

8thly. Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, says, "The three days before the creation of the heavenly luminaries, represent the Trinity; God, and his Word, and his Wisdom."

9thly. Clemens Alexandrinus prays to Christ to be propitious, and says, "Son and Father, both one Lord, grant that we may praise the Son, and the Father, with the Holy Ghost, all in one; *in* whom are all things, *through* whom are all things in one, through whom is eternity, of whom we are all members, to him, who is in all things good; in all things beautiful, universally wise and just, to whom be glory, both now and for ever. Amen." He also says, "Gather together thy children, to praise in a holy manner, to celebrate without guile, Christ, eternal Logos, infinite age, eternal light, fountain of mercy."

10thly. Tertullian says, "The name of Christ is every where believed, and every where worshipped, by all the nations mentioned above. He reigns every where, and is every where adored. He is alike to all a King, and to all a Judge, and to all a God and a Lord."

Again, "Behold all nations henceforth emerging from the gulf of error to the Lord God the Creator, and to God his Christ."

Tertullian also declares, that, "Tiberius received accounts from Palestine, of the things which manifested the truth of Christ's divinity."

To these Christian testimonies, all of the two first centuries, I shall subjoin a few others, out of multitudes, which belong to a later period.

The testimony of Origen, in his comment on the text, has been already seen. He also says, "We (Christians) worship one God, the Father, and the Son."

He farther says, "Now, that you may know the omnipotence of the Father and the Son to be one and the same, as he is one and the same God and Lord with the Father, hear what St. John hath said in the Revelation. "These things saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." For who is the Almighty that is to come, but Christ?"

He also mentions the Christians, as saying, "that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are one God; and speaks of this as a difficult and perplexing doctrine to such as hear not with faith, or are not Christians."

Again, he says, "When we come to the grace of baptism, we acknowledge one God only, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Origen flourished in the year 230.

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, who flourished in the year 248, says, "Christ is our God; that is, not of all, but of the faithful and believing."

The council of Antioch, which sat about the year 264, in their epistle, say, "In the whole church he is believed to be God, who emptied himself, indeed, of a state of equality with God; and *man*, of the seed of David, according to the flesh."

Eusebius, the celebrated ecclesiastical historian who flourished in the year 315, declares that Pilate, in his letter to Tiberius concerning the miracles of Christ, says, that "he was raised from the dead; and that he was already believed by the body of the people to be God."

This part of the subject I shall conclude with the following Heathen testimonies.

Pliny the Younger, in his letter to the emperor Trajan from the province of Bithynia, whither he went with proconsular authority writes, that "certain Christians, whom he had examined, affirmed, that they were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light, and sing among themselves, alternately, a hymn to Christ, as to some God."

This letter is, with the highest probability, placed in the year 107.

Celsus, an eminent Epicurean philosopher and adversary of the Christians, charges them with worshipping Christ, "who," he says, "has appeared of late;" and whom he calls "the Minister of God." Celsus flourished in the year 176.

At the same time flourished Lucian, the celebrated writer of Dialogues, and a philosopher of the same sect. In the Philopatris, a dialogue frequently attributed to him, Triphon represents the Christians as "swearing by the most high God; the great, immortal, celestial Son of the Father; the Spirit, proceeding from the Father; one of three, and three of one."

Hierocles, who flourished about the year 303, a Heathen philosopher also, says, that "the Christians, on account of a few miracles, proclaim Christ to be God."

On these testimonies I shall only ask a single question. Can any person who has them before him doubt, for a moment, that the Christian church, in its earliest ages, acknowledged and worshipped the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, as the only living and true God?

To the testimony of the Christian church I shall now add that of the Jewish church.

Philo, the celebrated Jew of Alexandria, who lived before the birth of our Saviour, calls the Logos, the eternal Logos, or Word; and says, that "he is necessarily eternal, and the image of the invisible God."

Farther he says, "He who *is* on each side attended by his nearest powers; of which one is *creative*, and the other *kingly*. The creative is God, by which he founded and adorned the universe: the kingly is Lord. He who is in the middle, being thus attended by both his powers, exhibits to the discerning mind the appearance sometimes of One, and sometimes of Three."

Of the Logos he says, "He who is the begotten, imitating the ways of his Father, and observing his archetypal patterns, produces forms;" that is, material things. He often calls the Logos the divine Logos; and represents him as the Manager or Ruler of the world. He farther says, that "God governs all things according to the strictest justice, having set over them his righteous Logos, his first-be-

gotten Son." The duration of created things he ascribes to this cause; that "they were framed by him who remains, and who is never in any respect changed; the divine Logos." Finally, he calls the Logos "an angel; the name of God, a man; the beginning; the eternal image; the most ancient angel; the archangel of many names; and the high-priest of this world;" and says, "his head is anointed with oil."

The Chaldee paraphrasts, and other Jewish commentators, speak of this subject in a similar manner.

They speak of the Mimra, the Hebrew term rendered in the Greek Λογος, and in the English *Word*, as "the Word from before the Lord," or which is before the Lord; as a Redeemer; as only-begotten; as the Creator. They say, the Word of the Lord said, "Behold Adam, whom I have created, is the only-begotten in the world; as I am the only-begotten in the highest heavens." They paraphrased the text Gen. iii. 8, *And they heard the voice of the Lord God, walking in the garden thus; "They heard the Word of the Lord God."*

Several Jewish commentators say, that "it was the Voice which was walking."

One of them says, that "our first parents, before their sin, saw the glory of God speaking to them; but after their sin, they only heard the Voice walking."

Philo and Jonathan both say, that "it was the Word of God which appeared unto Hagar."

Jonathan says, "God will receive the prayer of Israel by his Word." Paraphrasing Jer. xxix. 14, he says, "I will be sought by you in my Word."

The Jerusalem Targum, or paraphrase, says, "Abraham prayed in the name of the Word of the Lord, the God of the world."

Jonathan says also, "God will atone by his Word for his land, and for his people; even a people saved by the Word of the Lord."

Psal. cx. 1 they paraphrase, "The Lord said unto his Word," instead of *my Lord*, as in the original.

The Jewish commentators say, "There are *three degrees* in the mystery of Aleim, or Elohim; and these *degrees* they call *persons*. They say, "they are all one, and cannot be separated."

Deut. vi. 4, *Hear, O Isreal!* JEHOVAH, *our Aleim, is one* JEHOVAH, is thus rendered by the author of the Jewish book Zohar; "The Lord, and our God, and the Lord, are one." In his comment on this passage the author says, "The Lord, or JEHOVAH, is the beginning of all things, and the perfection of all things; and he is called the Father. The other, or our God, is the depth or the fountain of sciences, and is called the Son. The other, or Lord, he is the Holy Ghost, who proceeds from them both, &c. Therefore he says, *Hear, O Israel!* that is, join together this Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and make him one essence; one substance; for whatever is in the one is in the other. He hath been the whole; he is the whole; and he will be the whole."

Again, "What is the name of king Messiah?" Rabbi Akiba hath said, "JEHOVAH is his name. As it is declared Jer. xxiii. 6, *And this is his name by which they shall call him, Jehovah our Righteousness.*"

These commentators also call him the Branch, the Comforter; Gracious, Luminous, &c.

And again, "The Holy God calls the king Messiah by his name: JEHOVAH is his name: for it is said Exod. vii. 1, *The Lord is a man of war; Jehovah is his name.*"

To these explicit and unquestionable testimonies I shall now add a collection of others of a different nature, but scarcely less decisive.

In the concise history of the creation Moses says, more than thirty times, *Aleim*, that is, *Gods*, created: the noun being plural, and the verb singular, in every instance. These the Jewish paraphrasts explain by JEHOVAH; *his* WORD, that is, his Son; and *his* WISDOM, or Holy Spirit; which they call *three degrees.* These *three*, they assert, are *one:* and declare them to be one, inseparable JEHOVAH. This doctrine the Jews have exhibited in a variety of methods; clear, convincing, and impressive. These I shall now proceed to exhibit, after having premised a remarkable sentence from Rabbi Judah Hakkadosh, or Judah the holy, in which the doctrine of the Jewish church is declared in the most explicit manner. "God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, three in unity, one in trinity." This rabbi flourished in the second century.

With this preface I observe,

1st. *That the form of blessing used by the Jewish priests, and the mode of administering it when they blessed the congregation, strongly exhibited the doctrine of the Trinity.*

This form of blessing is prescribed in Num. vi. 24—26, JEHOVAH *bless thee and keep thee.* JEHOVAH *make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious to thee.* JEHOVAH *lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*

This blessing, according to rabbi Menachen, was pronounced in a different accent, during the utterance of each part; and according to an account given by two other rabbies, with the hand lifted up, and the three first fingers of the hand extended; the little finger being at the same time closed. This they say was done to express a triad, or trinity, in the Godhead.

2dly. The Jews anciently used a solemn symbol of the Deity, which they call Sephiroth; a word commonly signifying enumerations, but used by their learned men to denote splendours. These are sometimes exhibited in the form of a tree with its branches extended; and sometimes by ten concentric circles: that figure being the symbol of perfection. All these splendours are represented as issuing from the supreme and infinite source, as light from the sun.

Of this tree rabbi Schabte says, "There are three degrees; the root, the stem, and the branches; and these three are one." By this he intends, that the infinite source, and the other two degrees, are one and inseparable.

In the symbol of the circles, the three superior circles are called the *Crown*, Wisdom, and Understanding. "These," rabbi Isaac, a famous and learned Jew, says, "are the highest numerations, which possess one throne, on which sits the holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts." Two other celebrated Jewish doctors say, "These are the Voice, the Spirit, and the Word; and these are one." And Rambam, the most celebrated of them all, says, "The *Crown* is *the primordial Spirit* of the living Aleim; and *his Wisdom* is *a spirit from the Spirit;* and *the Understanding, waters from the Spirit;* and between these, though thus distinguished, there is no distinction in essence; because the end is annexed to the beginning, and the beginning to the end, and the middle is comprehended by them.

The remaining Sephiroth denoted the attributes of God.

The ancient Jews applied the three first letters of the incommunicable name, JEHOVAH, to denote the three superior splendours, viz. *Jod, He, Vau;* and the sacred *He*, or the last letter, denoted, according to them, the two natures of the second splendour, or person.

3dly. *The ancient Jews wrote the name of God symbolically, by including three jods within a circle, and subscribing under the jods, and within the circle, the vowel kametz.*

The circle was the figure denoting perfection. The three jods were the beginning letter of the word JEHOVAH thrice repeated, to denote the three persons in the Godhead. The kametz was the point of perfection, and denoted the same thing with the circle, and the unity of the divine essence.

4thly. Another method, used by the Jews to denote God, was to include in a square three radii, or points, disposed in the form of a crown. The crown seems to have denoted the dignity and supremacy of the object designed, and the number *three*, the three persons of the Godhead.

5thly. The letter *schin* was another *emblem of the Most High, in use among the Jews.*

This letter, which is the first in the word Shaddai, the Almighty, one of the scriptural names of God, is formed of three branches, alike in size and figure, especially as written in the ancient or Samaritan character, and united in one stem. This letter was distinctly written on those phylacteries which the Jews wore upon their heads.

6thly. *The equilateral triangle, with three small circles at the angles, and the letter jod inscribed over-against the upper angle, was another Jewish symbol of the Deity.* The three sides indicated the three persons of the Godhead, and the equal length of the sides their equality; while the *jod* was a direct proof that Jehovah was intended by the emblem. The three circles probably denoted the perfection of the three persons.

7thly. The Jews also delineated the sphere or representation of the universe as holden by three hands; two at the sides, and one at the bottom. Near the hands were inscribed the three Hebrew letters, *aleph, daleth, schin;* the initials of the three Hebrew words for truth, judgment, and peace. The same letters were also inscribed immediately above the sphere.

Such is the testimony of the Jewish church concerning this subject, composed on the one hand of direct declarations, and on the other of symbols equally definite and certain; especially as explained by their own commentators. These prove, beyond a reasonable debate, that the ancient Jewish church held uniformly the doctrine of the Trinity. The later Jews have indeed denied it; but to this denial they have been led merely by their hatred to Christianity.

I shall now proceed to mention the opinion of the Heathen nations concerning this subject.

1st. *The Hindoos have, from the most remote antiquity, holden a triad in the divine nature.*

The name of the Godhead among these people is Brahme. The names of the three persons in the Godhead are Brahma, Veeshnu, and Seeva. Brahma they considered as the Father, or supreme Source; Veeshnu as the Mediator, whom they assert to have been incarnate; and Seeva as the Destroyer and Regenerator: destruction being in their view nothing but the dissolution of preceding forms, for the purpose of reviving the same being in new ones.

The three faces of Brahma, Veeshnu, and Seeva, they always formed on one body, having six hands; or two to each person. This method of delineating the Godhead is ancient beyond tradition, universal, uncontroverted, and carved every where in their places of worship; particularly in the celebrated cavern in the island of Elephanta.

2dly. *Equally well known is the Persian triad; the names of which were* ORMUSD, MITHR, *and* AHRIMAN; *called by the Greeks* OROMASDES, MITHRAS, *and* ARIMANIUS. Mithras was commonly styled Τριπλασιος. Among *them*, as well as among the Hindoos, the second person in the triad was called the mediator, and regarded as the great agent in the present world.

In the oracles ascribed to Zerdusht, or Zoroaster, the famous Persian philosopher, are the following declarations.

"Where the Eternal Monad is, it amplifies itself, and generates a duality."

"A triad of Deity shines forth throughout the whole world, of which a Monad is the head."

"For the mind of the Father said, that all things should be divided into three; whose will assented, and all things were divided."

"And there appeared in this triad, virtue, wisdom, and truth, who knew all things."

"The Father performed all things, and delivered them over to the second mind, whom the nations of men commonly suppose to be the first."

The third person speaking of himself, says, "I Pysche, or Soul, dwell next to the paternal Mind, animating all things."

3dly. *The Egyptians also acknowledged a triad, from the earliest antiquity, whom they named originally* OSIRIS, CNEPH, *and* PHTHA; *and afterward Osiris, Isis, and Typhon.* These persons they denoted by the symbols *light, fire, and spirit.* They represented them also on the doors and other parts of their sacred buildings in the three figures of a *globe*, a *wing*, and a *serpent*. Abenephius, an Arabian writer, says, that "by these the Egyptians shadowed Θεον τριμορφον; or God in three forms."

One of the Egyptian fundamental axioms of theology, as given by Damascius, and cited by Cudworth, is, "There is one principle of all things, praised under the name of the unknown darkness, and this thrice repeated."

In the books attributed to Hermes Trismegistus is the following passage.

"There hath ever been one great, intelligent light, which has always illumined the mind; and their union is nothing else but the Spirit, which is the bond of all things."

Here light and mind are spoken of as two persons, and the spirit as the third; all declared to be eternal.

Jamblichus, a Platonic philosopher, styled by Proclus the Divine, declares that "Hermes speaks of Eicton as the first of intelligences, and the first intelligible; and of Cneph, or Emeph, as the Prince of the celestial Gods; and of the Demiurgic, or creating mind, as a third to these. Jamblichus calls these the Demiurgic mind, the guardian of truth and wisdom.

4thly. *The Orphic theology, the most ancient recorded in Grecian history, taught the same doctrine.*

In the abridgment of this theology by Timotheus the Chronographer, are found its most important and characteristical doctrines. Of these the fundamental one is, that an eternal, incomprehensible being exists, who is the Crea-

tor of all things. This supreme and eternal being is styled in this theology, Φως, Βουλη, Ζωη; *Light, Counsel, Life.*

Suidas, speaking of these three, says, "they express only one and the same power." Timotheus says farther, that Orpheus declared "all things to have been made by one Godhead in three names; or rather by these names of one Godhead; and that this Godhead is all things."

Proclus, a Platonic philosopher already mentioned, says that Orpheus taught "the existence of one God, who is the ruler over all things; and that this one God is three minds, three kings; he who is; he who has, or possesses; and he who beholds. These three minds he declares to be the same with the triad of Orpheus; viz. Phanes, Uranus, and Chronus.

5thly. *The Greek philosophers also extensively acknowledged a triad.*

Particularly, Pythagoras styled God το ἑν, or the Unity; and μοναϛ, or that which is alone; and also το Αγαθον, or the Good.

From this eternal Monad," says Pythagoras, "there sprang an infinite duality;" that is, from him who existed alone, two proceeded who were infinite.

Plato also held a triad; and named them το Αγαθον, the Good; Νουϛ, or Λογοϛ, Mind, or Word; and Ψυχη κοσμου, the Soul of the world. The το Αγαθον he also calls πρωτοϛ Θεοϛ, and μεγιστοϛ Θεοϛ.

Parmenides, the founder of the Eleatic philosophy, says, The Deity is ἑν και πολλα, one and many. Simplicius, commenting on Plato's exhibition of the doctrines of Parmenides, says, that "these words were a description of the αυτου Ονϛοϛ," the true or original existence; and Plotinus says, that Parmenides acknowledged three divine unities subordinated. The first unity he calls the most perfectly and properly one; the second, one many; and the third, one and many. Plotinus farther says, that Parmenides acknowledged a triad of original persons. Plotinus speaks of God as being "the one, the mind, and the soul;" which he calls the original or principal persons. Amelius calls these persons three Kings, and three Creators.

Numenius, a famous Pythagorean, acknowledged a triad. The second person he calls the son of the first; and the third he speaks of, as proceeding also from the first.

6thly. *In the empires of Thibet and Tangut, a triune God is constantly acknowledged in the popular religion.* Medals, having the image of such a God stamped on them, are given to the people by the Delai Lama, to be suspended, as holy, around their necks, or otherwise used in their worship. These people also worshipped an idol, which was the representation of a threefold God.

7thly. A medal, now in the cabinet of the emperor of Russia, was found near the river Kemptschyk, a branch of the Jenisea, in Siberia, of the following description.

A human figure is formed on one side, having one body and three heads. This person sits upon the cup of the Lotos; the common accompaniment of the Godhead in various eastern countries; and on a sofa, in the manner of eastern kings. On the other side is the following inscription, "The bright and sacred image of the Deity, conspicuous in three figures. Gather the holy purpose of God from *them:* love *him.*" A Heathen could not more justly or strongly describe a trinity.

8thly. *The ancient Scandinavians acknowledged a triad; whom they styled Odin, Frea,* and *Thor.* In the Edda, the most remarkable monument of Scandinavian theology, Gangler, a prince of Sweden, is exhibited as being introduced into the hall, or palace, of the God. Here he saw three thrones raised one above another, and on each throne a sacred person. These persons were thus described to him by his guide: "He, who sits on the lowest throne, is Har, or the lofty one. The second is Jafn Har, or equal to the lofty one. He, who sits on the highest throne, is Thridi, or the third.

9thly. *The Romans, Germans, and Gauls, acknowledged a triad, and worshipped a triad, in various manners.*

The Romans and Germans worshipped the Mairæ; three goddesses inseparable, and always united in their worship, temples, and honours.

The Romans also, together with the Grecks and Egyptians, worshipped the Cabiri, or three mighty ones.

The Diana of the Romans is stamped on a medal, as having three faces on three distinct heads, united to one form. On the reverse is the image of a man, holding his

hand to his lips; under whom is this inscription; "Be silent; it is a mystery."

The German goddess, Trygla, was drawn in the same manner.

The Gauls also united their gods in triple groupes, in a manner generally similar, as is evident from sculptures, either now or lately remaining.

10thly. *The Japanese and Chinese anciently acknowledged a triad.*

The great image of the Japanese is one form with three heads; generally resembling that of Brahma, Veeshnu, and Seeva, already described as worshipped by the Hindoos. The Chinese worshipped in ancient times one supreme God, without images or symbols of any kind. This worship lasted till after the death of Confucius, about five hundred years before the birth of Christ.

Lao-Kiun, the celebrated founder of one of the philosophical or religious sects in China, delivered this as the great leading doctrine of his philosophy, "that the eternal reason produced one; one produced two; two produced three; and three produced all things."

11thly. *The American nations also have in several instances acknowledged a triad.*

The Iroquois hold, that before the creation three spirits existed; all of whom were employed in creating mankind.

The Peruvians adored a triad, whom they styled the Father and Lord Sun, the Son Sun, and the Brother Sun.

In Cuquisaco, a province of Peru, the inhabitants worshipped an image, named Tangatanga; which in their language signifies one in three, and three in one.

Thus I have finished this numerous collection of testimonies to the great scriptural doctrine of the trinity. The labour, employed in making it, has, I hope, not been useless. In a serious mind it cannot, I think, fail to produce, not conviction only, but astonishment and delight, to see the wonderful manner in which God has diffused and perpetuated the evidence of this doctrine throughout the successive periods of time. The testimonies of the Jewish and Christian churches are complete and irresistible. We are not to expect, that, amid all the ignorance of Heathen-

ism, correct and unobjectionable ideas of God should be found in any nation.

But when we consider, that the doctrine of a triad has been so evidently received, without a question, in all the four quarters of the globe, and by so many different nations; that it was received among almost all those who were ancient; that it was received independently of the Scriptures; that it was expressed in so many forms, and those completely decisive as to the real meaning; that the scheme in all these forms was, unanswerably, the union of three divine beings or persons in one; and that this scheme was so often and so definitely explained in multiplied and very various modes of expression; modes of expression too which are incapable of being misconstrued; we cannot, I think, fail to determine, that the doctrine of the Trinity was originally revealed to the human race; and has almost every where been conveyed down, both in their worship and their sacred traditions.

SERMON LXXII.

REGENERATION.

THE AGENT. HIS AGENCY.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. —TIT. III. 5.

IN a preceding discourse, I proposed to enter upon an inquiry into the great subject of *regeneration* under two principal heads:

I. *The agent in this work*; and,

II. *The work itself.*

The former of these subjects I proposed to discuss under these heads;

I. *The character of the agent;* and,

II. *His agency.*

The character of the agent I have already examined.

In investigating his agency I propose to consider,

I. *The fact;*

II. *Its nature;*

III. *Its necessity;* and,

IV. *The objections to it.*

It will be observed, that I here take it for granted, that mankind are, in some instances, really regenerated; reserving the proof of this doctrine to a future occasion, when I shall come to the discussion of the second thing originally proposed; viz. *the work of regeneration.* In discoursing on collateral subjects of theology, or of any other science, it is not, very unfrequently, necessary to suppose one or more of them, for the time, allowed; to preclude useless embarrassment in the discussion of the others. This however is to be done only for the time; and only for the purpose which has been specified. It is no part of my design, in this system, to take any point in theology for granted; nor to expect the belief of any doctrine alleged by me, unless the arguments adduced to support it shall be found solid and convincing. Nor do I ever intend to consider any thing as granted by those who differ from me, unless I suppose it to be really granted by them. If there be found in this system of discourses any thing contrary to these principles, I hope it will be considered as the result of inattention and error on my own part; for no departure from them will receive any justification from me.

With these things premised I shall now proceed to a consideration of

I. *The fact, that the Holy Ghost is the agent in the regeneration of man.*

It will be easily seen, that the proof of this position must be derived from the Scriptures; and that all the evidence concerning it, furnished by reason and experience, must be merely auxiliary; and cannot, in the nature of the case, be decisive. From the Scriptures then I shall proceed to allege such proofs of this doctrine, as to me appear satisfactory.

1st. *I argue this doctrine from declarations of the Scriptures.*

The text is one of these declarations.

In this passage we are said to be *saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.* The word *renewing* is an exact translation of the original word in this place. *To renew* signifies, as you well know, *to make new,* or *to make over again.* This operation is here ascribed to the Holy Ghost in as simple and unambiguous terms as are possible.

John i. 12, 13, is another example of the same nature. *But to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

In this passage of Scripture it is asserted, that the birth, by which mankind become the sons of God, is derived not from blood, or natural descent; nor, from the will of the flesh; nor from the will of man; that is, not from human contrivance and determination in any form; but from God. It is difficult to conceive how this doctrine could be more clearly asserted. But if those who sustain this character are born of God, they are born of the Spirit of God. For our Saviour, discoursing on this subject in the third chapter, says, *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* Here the persons said in the former passage to be born of God, are declared by our Saviour to be born of the Spirit; and that which is born of the Spirit is declared alone to be spiritual. So far as I can see, these passages in the most decisive manner assert regeneration to be exclusively the work of the Spirit of God.

In this passage also, *that which is born of the flesh* is declared to be *flesh;* that is, whatever proceeds from a fleshly source partakes of its fleshly nature. The word *flesh* is customarily used in the Scriptures to denote *the native character of man.* In this sense *the carnal* or fleshly *mind* is declared by St. Paul to be *enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed capable of being subject to it.* In the same sense, the same apostles say,

In me, that is, *in my flesh*, or natural character, *dwelleth no good thing*.

A contrast is studiously run between that which proceeds from the *Spirit*, and that which proceeds from the *flesh*; or, to use the words of our Saviour in the passage above quoted, between *that which is flesh, and that which is spirit*; in several passages of Scripture. *To be carnally minded*, says St. Paul, *is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace*. Rom. viii. 6. In the original, *the minding of the flesh is death; but the minding of the Spirit is life and peace*. And again, Gal. v. 19—23, *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such-like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.* In these passages, the different natures of the fleshly and spiritual character, are too strongly marked to need a comment. All that is sinful, odious to God, and the object of his wrath, plainly belongs to the former; and all that is holy, lovely in the sight of God, and the object of his favour, belongs to the latter. But *that which is born of the flesh is flesh*; is of this odious guilty nature; *while that which is born of the Spirit is alone spirit*. In other words, whatever is good and acceptable before God in the character of man, is produced by the Holy Ghost.

In 2 Thess. ii. 13 St. Paul says, *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through the sanctification of the Holy Ghost*. The Thessalonian church then was chosen to salvation: How? Through the sanctification of the Holy Ghost. The sanctification of these persons then was a part of the original purpose of God, and a prerequisite to their salvation. The Thessalonians therefore were renewed, or regenerated, by the Holy Ghost; and by necessary conclusion, all others who become the subjects of regeneration.

1 Cor. vi. 11, *But ye are sanctified by the Spirit of God*. In the two preceding verses, St. Paul mentions several

classes of men, who, he declares, *shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* Then he subjoins, *Such were some of you. But,* he adds, *ye are sanctified by the Spirit of God.* Formerly these Corinthians were of the number of those, who, continuing in their proper character, could *not inherit the kingdom of God.* That which now made them of a new and opposite character, was that they were *sanctified by the Spirit of God.*

In Ezekiel xxxvi. 26, 27, God says, *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.* Here, giving these Israelites a new heart and a new spirit, is plainly and exactly equivalent to the import of this declaration, *I will put my Spirit within you;* as the consequence of which it is declared, that they *shall walk in the statutes of God, and keep his judgments.* The disposition therefore with which mankind keep the statutes, or obey the law of God, is pronounced in them by God himself, and is effectuated by his Spirit.

In the following chapter God says, ver. 13, 14, to the house of Israel, represented as spiritually dead, *Ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live.* Here spiritual life is exhibited as the immediate effect of the agency of the Spirit of God.

To these passages of Scripture I shall subjoin a few more, out of a great multitude, to the same purpose. *For the love of God is shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost.* Rom. v. 5.

Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. 1 Cor. vi. 19.

No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. 1 Cor. xii. 3.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Rom. viii. 14.

I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring. Isa. xliv. 3. The direct consequence of this effusion of the Spirit is declared in ver. 5. *One shall say, I am the* LORD'S, *and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob.*

2dly. *The same doctrine is taught us by facts contained in the Scriptures.*

Our Saviour preached to the Jewish nation at least three years and a half; if not more than four years. It will be admitted, that he was the best of all preachers; and that his preaching was more perfectly calculated, than any other, to produce holiness in the hearts of those who heard him. Yet it will also be admitted, that he was not a very successful preacher. We naturally ask, Why was he not successful? The apostles on the contrary, though certainly and greatly inferior to Christ in wisdom and persuasiveness, preached still with wonderful success. St. Peter, by the first sermon which he delivered to the Jews, probably converted more to the faith and obedience of the gospel, than Christ during the whole of his ministry. We naturally ask also, Whence arose this wonderfully different efficacy in the preaching of St. Peter and that of his Master? The persons whom they both addressed were the same. They had been witnesses of the miracles of both. Why then were they perfectly dead to the preaching of Christ; and *pricked to the heart,* and turned to God, by that of St. Peter? The cause was not in the preaching. It was not in the hearers: for they were the very same persons. It was then an extraneous cause. The event was not derived *from the will of the flesh, nor from the will of man, but from God.*

St. Paul preached at *Philippi many days.* It seems clear, that the jailer must frequently have heard him. Yet his words made no impression upon the jailer's heart, until that night in which he was converted. Yet then in a moment, upon Paul's calling to him *to do himself no harm,* he hastened into the prison, and cried out to Paul and Silas, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* A cause, adequate to this change in the jailer, must be admitted here: and this can have been no other, than that *the Lord opened his heart,* as he had before done that of Lydia in the same place.

Generally, to what other cause can be assigned the universal success of the apostles in preaching the gospel? St. Peter has taught us to attribute this wonderful event to the peculiar and remarkable effusion of the Holy Ghost *in the last days,* or days of the gospel, predicted by the prophet Joel, and begun to be accomplished on the day of Pente-

cost. If this be not admitted as the true cause, it will, I apprehend, be very difficult to assign another, which will be found adequate to the effect, or which will in any measure satisfy a sober inquirer.

II. *The nature of this agency next demands our consideration.*

Concerning this I observe,

1st. *That it is the result of the mere good pleasure of God.* Whatever other reasons may exist for the communication of this essential blessing (and that the best reasons do exist can never be seriously questioned), it is plainly impossible, that it should be merited by any child of Adam. The very supposition, that we are regenerated, involves the necessity of our regeneration. But this necessity is the result of our sinfulness only; and this character plainly precludes, wherever it is found, the possibility of meriting to be regenerated. The agency of the divine Spirit in this work is therefore, on the one hand sovereign, and on the other gracious; or, in other words, flows from the sovereign and unmerited mercy of our divine benefactor.

2dly. *It is unresisted.*

It has often been called *irresistible.* This language has given rise to very extensive, and, as I apprehend, to very unwarrantable, controversies in the Christian church. Others, and among them men of great respectability, have more sanguine expectations concerning the issue of debates about metaphysical subjects, than I am able to form; and, perhaps, I should be unwarranted in saying that they are not more just. But, so far as my acquaintance with the views and reasonings of men extends, I entertain very faint hopes of seeing any solid good spring from speculations concerning *the nature of causes, and the modes of their operation.* The facts, that such and such causes exist, and that they operate to the production of such and such effects, we, in many instances, well understand. But the nature of the cause itself, and the nature and manner of its efficiency, are, in most instances, too subtle, or too entirely hidden from our view, either to be perceived at all, or to be so perceived, as to become the materials of real and useful knowledge. Hence, probably, has been derived the fact, that

speculations on such subjects, though often satisfactory to the philosopher himself, and to his own immediate friends and followers, have rarely satisfied others, or produced any lasting effects on mankind. The schoolmen were perhaps as able investigators of such subjects, as the world has ever seen: and their speculations were, at times, proofs of sagacity and discrimination not inferior to what has been displayed in the most boasted efforts of succeeding ages. Yet how little are they studied, or remembered at the present time! Scarcely are they mentioned, unless with pity or contempt; or as sources of astonishment, awakened by the sight of talents misapplied.

The success of these men should, one would think, furnish a lesson to such as follow after them. They, too, had their day of reputation and splendour; of splendour, far superior to any thing which modern writers can boast, or modern times will ever be disposed to give. But *it was a vapour, which appeared for a little time, and then vanished away. The morning clouds* of the present day will appear for a period still less; and the system, which for the moment attracts many eyes, will in another moment be forgotten. Neither the fame acquired by the author, nor the stability attributed to his system by his followers, should therefore induce us to rely on the desert of the one, or the permanency of the other.

When it is said, that the agency of the divine Spirit, in renewing the heart of man, is *irresistible*, it is probably said, because this agency being an exertion of omnipotence, is concluded, of course, to be irresistible by human power. This seems not however to be said on solid grounds. *That* agency of the Holy Ghost, which St. Stephen informs us was resisted by the Jews and by their fathers, was an exertion of the same omnipotence; and was yet resisted by human power. I know of nothing in the regenerating agency of the same Spirit, except the fact, that it is never resisted, which proves it to be irresistible, any more than that which the Jews actually resisted. That the Spirit of God can do any thing with man, and constitute man any thing which he pleases, cannot be questioned. But that he will exert a regenerating agency on the human mind, which man has not a natural power to resist, or which man

could not resist if he would, is far from being satisfactorily evident to me. Indeed, I am ready to question whether this very language does not lead the mind to views concerning this subject, which are radically erroneous.

In the one hundred and tenth Psalm, in which we have an account of Christ's being constituted *a priest for ever after the order of* MELCHISEDEK, we have in the third verse this remarkable promise made to Christ, *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.* This promise respects the very subject now under consideration; and is, I suspect, a more accurate account of it, than can be found in the language which I am opposing. In the day of Christ's power, his people *are* willing. The influence, which he exerts on them by his Spirit, is of such a nature, that their wills, instead of attempting any resistance to it, coincide with it readily and cheerfully; without any force or constraint on his part, or any opposition on their own. *That it is an unresisted agency, in all cases,* is unquestionable: *that it is irresistible, in any,* does not appear.

III. *The necessity of this agency will, if I mistake not, be evident from the following considerations:*

1st. *It is declared in the Scriptures.*

No man, saith our Saviour, *can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him.* This declaration will, I suppose, be allowed by the warmest opposers of this doctrine to have a meaning. There are but two meanings which it can possibly have. One is, *that it is physically impossible for any man to come to Christ, unless drawn by the Father:* the other is, that *it is morally impossible.* The former of these will be denied by both parties; the latter must therefore be conceded. In other words, it must be acknowledged, that mankind are so opposed to Christ in their inclinations, that they will never come to him, that is, believe on him, unless drawn by the Father; or, which is the same thing, renewed by his Spirit. It will be remembered, that God is no where in the Scriptures exhibited as drawing mankind to Christ in any manner, than by the influence of the Holy Ghost.

Except a man be born of the Spirit, says our Saviour, *he cannot see the kingdom of God.* Here it is obvious,

that to be *born of the Spirit* is declared to be an event, without which it is impossible for men *to see the kingdom of God*. The necessity of the agency of the Spirit cannot be more strongly exhibited, than in the declaration, that without it, it is impossible to see the kingdom of God.

The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. If the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God; if he cannot know them; if they are foolishness unto him; so long as he continues in this natural state; if they are spiritually discerned, and therefore incapable of being discerned without a spiritual taste and character; if, at the same time, the discernment and knowledge of spiritual things is indispensably necessary to our attainment of salvation; then the agency of the Spirit of God in our regeneration is absolutely necessary to us, in the same sense and degree in which our salvation is necessary. Our Saviour declares to Nicodemeus, that *that only which is born of the Spirit is spirit,* or spiritual; while *that which is born of the flesh;* viz. all that is in man, and all that belongs to his natural character; *is flesh;* that is, is of this very natural character, *which receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.*

2dly. *Reason teaches the same doctrine.*

The question has been often asked, "*Why, since a holy mind can become sinful, a sinful mind may not also become holy?* No preternatural agency," it is observed, "is necessary to accomplish the former change, why is any such agency necessary to accomplish the latter? the extent of the change in both instances is exactly the same; the one being merely the converse of the other. It would seem then, that the same physical powers, which are sufficient for the accomplishment of the former, must be sufficient also for the accomplishment of the latter. But by most men it is acknowledged, that the physical powers of the same being, when holy, are exactly the same as when sinful; both the understanding and the will remaining, in the physical sense, unaltered. Where then lies the impossibility, or even the difficulty, of the supposition, that man can regenerate himself; or, which is the same thing, turn of his own accord from sin to holiness?"

All these questions are in my view fairly asked; and all the principles suggested true. Still the conclusion is unsound, and will not follow. This however I am bound to prove in a manner equally fair; and the more especially as a great multitude of serious, and I hope, good men have found, and still find, no little difficulty in their contemplations on this subject.

That a holy being should be capable of sinning seems not, in the nature of the case, to be a supposition attended with any great difficulty. All beings, holy and sinful alike, relish and desire natural good, or happiness. This can be found in an endless multitude of objects. Of these some may be enjoyed lawfully, or consistently with the will of God: while others cannot. These however, so far as they are supposed capable of communicating happiness, are still naturally the objects of desire to holy beings, as truly as to sinful ones. All natural good, when perceived, is, by itself considered, desired of course by every percipient being. Now it is plain, that this good may, in a given case, appear so great to a holy being, may so engross his whole attention, may so far exclude from his mind other considerations, and among them those of his duty; as to induce him to seek the good in view at the expense of his duty. In this manner, I apprehend, the angels who fell violated their duty; and our first parents theirs. Nor do I see how holy beings, so long as they love natural good, and are placed in a world where it is variously and amply provided, can fail of being exposed to temptations from this source; nor, if these temptations be supposed to possess a given degree of power, or, which is the same thing, to contain a given degree of natural good, and to be set fully and exclusively before the mind, how such beings can fail, without peculiar divine assistance, of being exposed to fall.

In all this, however, there is nothing to countenance the supposition, that a sinner will in the same manner turn from sin to holiness. A sinner has no relish for spiritual good; that is, for the enjoyment furnished by virtuous affections and virtuous conduct. To apply the words of Isaiah concerning Christ, as regarded by the Jews, to this good, as regarded by sinners, *When they see it, there is no beauty in it, that they should desire it.* Isa. liii. 2. Whenever

this good, therefore, becomes an object of the sinner's contemplation, as his mind is wholly destitute of any relish for it, he will never desire it for its own sake; and will never make any such efforts to gain it, as are absolutely necessary to accomplish the renovation of his heart. The relish for spiritual good is that state of mind, out of which all virtuous volitions spring. No volition is ever excited but by good; and by good actually perceived and relished. As spiritual good is never thus perceived by a sinner, it will not excite a single volition in his mind towards the attainment of it; but will operate upon him as little, as harmony upon the deaf, or beautiful colours upon the blind.

But the relish for spiritual good is the characteristical distinction of holy beings; their *essential* characteristic; without which they would cease to be holy. The want of it, on the contrary, is a primary characteristic of sinful beings. In this lies the real difficulty of regenerating ourselves, and not in the want of sufficient natural powers: and, so long as this continues, an extraneous agency must be absolutely necessary for our regeneration.

IV. *The objections to the agency of the divine Spirit in this work shall now be briefly considered.*

1st. *It is objected, that this doctrine infers partiality in the conduct of God.*

That in the conduct of God, in this case, there are mysterious and difficult things, which I cannot explain, I readily acknowledge. What the particular reasons are, by which God is influenced in this dispensation, he has not been pleased to reveal; and we therefore are wholly unable to determine. It is sufficient for us, that we know all his conduct, in this and every other case, to be directed by the best reasons.

But this case presents no more difficulty than a thousand others, in which we do not even think of starting this objection. We might as well complain of the common dispensations of God's providence, as of this. "Why," we might ask, "was one child born of Popish parents, and educated in all the ignorance and superstition of the Romish religion; and another born of Protestant parents, and educated under the light and blessings of the reformed religion? why is

one man destined by his birth to be a savage; and another to be a member of civilized, enlightened, and religious society; why is one man a native of Sennaar; and another of New England: one a beggar; another a prince: one deaf and dumb; another endowed with hearing and speech; why are there any beggars; any savages? nay, why are there any men; and why are we not all angels?

To apply the question to the very case in hand; Why, on the supposition that we regenerate ourselves, is one man furnished with those endowments both of understanding and will, and with those advantages, all of which, united, terminate in his regeneration; and another, not?

It will be easily seen from these questions, that the objection of partiality lies with the same force against all inequalities of distribution in the divine government as against this dispensation. Indeed, the only way to remove this objection must be to make all beings exactly alike, and to confer on them exactly the same distributions. In other words, God, in order to remove this objection, must make all his conduct a mere repetition of exactly the same actions towards every creature.

2dly. *It is objected, also, that this doctrine supposes man not to be a free agent in his regeneration.*

To this objection I answer, that, if it be true, and be seen by us to be true, our knowledge of its truth must be derived either from some declaration of the Scriptures, or from the nature of the subject, philosophically investigated. From the former of these sources we cannot derive this knowledge: because no declaration of Scripture asserts any thing of this nature. All our knowledge with regard to it, therefore, must of course be derived from the latter. I ask, then, what knowledge does the nature of this subject furnish us of the truth of the objection? Is it derived from the fact, *that this agency has been called irresistible?* With the arguments derived from the use of this term on either side, I have no concern. It is not used in the Scriptures, nor do I either discern or admit the propriety of using it. The task of defending the use of it, therefore, I shall leave to those who do.

Is it derived from the fact, *that this agency is extraneous?* It will not be pretended, that all extraneous influence on

the mind destroys its freedom. *We* act upon the minds of each other, and often with complete efficacy; yet it will not be said, that we destroy each other's freedom of acting. God, for aught that appears, may act, also, on our minds, and with an influence, which shall be decisive; and yet not destroy, nor even lessen, our freedom.

Does the truth of the objection appear *in the particular kind of agency here used?* Let me ask the objector, what is this particular kind of agency? the only account of the subject in the Scriptures is, that it is *renovating, regenerating,* or *sanctifying.* So far as my knowledge extends, neither the friends nor the adversaries of the doctrine have added any thing to this account which explains the subject any farther. But can it be said, even with plausibility, that God cannot sanctify any intelligent creature without infringing on his freedom. If it be said, it should also be proved; and this, so far as my knowledge extends, has not hitherto been done. Until it shall be done, the mere assertion of our opponents may be fairly answered by a contrary assertion.

When God created man, he created him in his own image. This, St. Paul informs us, consists *in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness.* But if God, without destroying, or rather preventing, *his* freedom of agency, could *create* him in this image; it will be difficult to prove, or to conceive, that he cannot *restore* to his descendants the same image, after it has been lost, without destroying *their* freedom. The *thing given* is the same; and *the agency by which it is given* is the same. Its *influence on the freedom of the creature* must therefore be exactly the same. Its whole influence, in both cases alike, is successive to the agency itself; and must, of course, affect the freedom of the creature in precisely the same manner.

Does *our experience* furnish any knowledge of this nature? Ask any Christian; and he will tell you, if competent to answer the question, that he is conscious of no loss, nor change, in his own freedom of acting: that, on the contrary, he chose and acted in the same manner as before, and with the same full possession of all his powers; and that the only difference between his former and present state is, that he now loves God, and obeys him voluntarily;

whereas he formerly hated him and voluntarily disobeyed him.

The truth is, this objection is not derived from revelation, nor from fact. It owes its existence only to the philosophical scheme of agency, which makes the freedom of moral beings consist in *self-determination, indifference, and contingency;* a scheme, in its own nature impossible, and self-contradictory; as any person may see completely evinced in an inquiry concerning this subject by the first *president Edwards.*

Upon the whole, the plain declarations of the Scriptures are not to be set aside by the philosophy of men. Especially is this not to be done, where the subject of investigation lies, as in the present case, beyond our reach. What the precise nature of the agency of the Holy Ghost, in regenerating mankind, is, in the metaphysical sense, man cannot know. It becomes all men therefore, to be satisfied with the declarations of God, who does know; who cannot deceive us; and who has, of course, declared to us the truth.

SERMON LXXIII.

REGENERATION.

ITS NECESSITY AND REALITY.

Jesus answered, and said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.—JOHN III. 3.

HAVING considered *the character of the Holy Ghost,* and *his agency in the work of regeneration,* I shall now proceed, according to the plan originally proposed, to examine the *work itself,* under the three following heads:

I. *The necessity;*

II. *The reality;* and,

III. *The nature; of regeneration.*

I. *I shall consider the necessity of the work of regeneration.*

In the preceding discourse, I took the fact, that some men are regenerated, for granted; and on this ground, attempted to prove, that the agency of the Spirit of God was necessary for the accomplishment of our regeneration. The question concerning the necessity of regeneration itself, and the question concerning the necessity of that agency in producing it, are entirely distinct. Yet it will be readily perceived, that the arguments, adduced under the latter question, in the preceding discourse, may with unabated force be in several instances applied to the former; *that*, which is now under consideration. Particularly is this true concerning several passages of Scripture, then adduced. For example, John iii. 5, 6; Rom. viii. 6, 7; Gal. v. 19—33; 2 Thes. ii. 13; 1 Cor. vi. 11, connected with the context; are all, together with several others, of this nature. On these, to avoid wearying my audience with repetitions, I shall not at present insist.

At the same time, the certainty, that there is nothing in our moral character, which will lead us to regenerate ourselves, as exhibited in that discourse, is one, and an important one, among the reasons, which evince, in connexion with other arguments, the necessity of our regeneration; and is therefore with propriety recalled to your remembrance on the present occasion.

But the great proof of the necessity of regeneration is found in the depravity of our nature. The universality, and the degree of this corruption have been shewn, if I am not deceived, in a manner, too evident to be rationally called in question. In the discourses which I formerly delivered on these subjects,* I produce a long train of passages of Scripture, in which the natural character of man is, in the most unequivocal terms, declared to be corrupt, sinful and abominable in the sight of God. This truth I elucidated, also, by arguments drawn from reason and experience, which to my own view were unanswerable. Among these, I specified the opposition made by mankind to the gospel; the testimonies, which mankind have themselves

* See Sermons xxix to xxxiv inclusive.

given concerning this subject in their laws, their religion, their history! their conversation; and their conduct, both in amusements, and in the serious business of life. From these, and several other things, I derived it as a consequence, flowing in my own view irresistibly, from the premises, that *in our flesh*, or native character, *there dwelleth no good thing*.

This doctrine St. Paul teaches, in the most explicit manner, in the three first chapters of the Epistle to the Romans; and commenting on his own words, says, *we have proved both* JEWS *and* GENTILES, *that they are all under sin*.

I shall consider this point as being *actually* proved; and on this basis shall found the following arguments, designed to shew the necessity of regeneration.

1st. *It is unreasonable to suppose, that God can admit sinners to the blessings of heaven.*

God is perfectly holy, and therefore regards sin only with hatred and abhorrence. Every sinner opposes his whole character, law, designs, and government; loves what he hates; hates what he loves; and labours to dishonour his name, and to frustrate his purposes. The designs of God involve the supreme and eternal good of the universe. In the accomplishment of this divine purpose, his glory is entirely manifested; because the best of all characters is thus displayed in the most perfect degree. But these designs, and the character discovered in accomplishing them, the sinner steadily hates and opposes. Were it in his power, he would frustrate the accomplishment; and prevent the glory of God, and the supreme good of the creation.

This character of the sinner God discerns with clear and unerring certainty. Both his guilt and its desert are naked to the omniscient eye. It is impossible, therefore, that he should not regard it with abhorrence. To suppose him then to approve and love such a character, is to suppose him to approve of that, which he sees to be deserving of his absolute reprobation; and to love that which he knows merits nothing but his hatred. Should he in fact do this, he would invert his whole system of dispensations towards the universe; and exhibit to his intelligent creatures a cha-

racter totally new, and directly opposite to that which he has displayed hitherto, in his law and government; especially in the work of redemption.

Of course, he would not only cease to be unchangeable, but would become a being of a totally opposite character, to that perfect one which he has hitherto challenged to himself. He would renounce his Deity, and cease to sustain the excellence involved in the incommunicable name JEHOVAH.

Farther; should God, without approving of a sinful character, confer upon the unregenerated sinner the blessings which are proper rewards of virtuous creatures, he would equally desert his character and government; and overthrow the wisdom, equity, and end, of his designs. Every external favour, shewn to guilty beings after their probation is ended, is a testimony on the part of God, that he approves of their conduct during the probationary state, and a reward for that conduct. It is a definitive testimony; a testimony, given when all their conduct is before him; a solemn judicial testimony; a testimony of action, the surest interpreter of the thoughts. In the present case, it would be the highest and most solemn of all testimonies; because he would bestow on them the greatest of all rewards, the blessings of heaven.

If then he did not feel this approbation he would, in the case supposed, declare the greatest possible falsehood to the universe; *viz.* that impenitent sinners merited the highest rewards which it was in his power to bestow. He would declare, that such sinners deserved the same proofs of his favour as his obedient children, and were therefore of the same character; that rebels were faithful subjects; that enemies were friends; and that although he had heretofore denounced them as objects of his wrath, they were still the objects of his infinite complacency. This would be no other than a final declaration on his part, that right and wrong, holiness and sin, were the same things; that his law, and the government founded on it, were introduced to no purpose, unless to excite wonder and fear in his intelligent creatures; that the redemption of Christ was accomplished to no end; and that all the divine conduct, solemn, awful, and sublime, as it has appeared, was wholly destitute of any

object, and really of no importance in the view of the infinite mind.

2dly. *This change of heart is absolutely necessary for the sinner himself, in order to make him capable of the happiness of heaven.*

Heaven is the seat of supreme and unmingled happiness; of enjoyment, solid, sincere, and eternal. The foundation, on which, so far as creatures are concerned, this happiness ultimately rests, is their holy or virtuous character. All their affections, all their pursuits, all their enjoyments, are virtuous without a mixture. Hence heaven is called *the high* and *holy place;* and from the dispensations of God towards these unspotted beings, is termed *the habitation of his holiness.* With such companions a sinner could not accord; such affections he could not exercise; in such pursuits he could not unite; in such enjoyments he could not share. This is easily and familiarly demonstrated. Sinners do not love virtuous persons here; exercise no virtuous affections; engage in no virtuous pursuits; and relish no virtuous enjoyments. Sinners in the present world love not God; trust not in the Redeemer; delight not in Christians; and regard neither the law of God nor the gospel of his Son with complacency of heart. Sinners in this world find no pleasure in the sabbath, nor in the sanctuary; and never cordially unite either in the prayers or the praises then and there offered up to their Maker.

How then could sinners find happiness in heaven? that glorious world is one vast sanctuary; and the endless succession of ages, which roll over its happy inhabitants, are an everlasting sabbath. Their great and commanding enjoyment is unceasing and eternal worship. *They rest not day nor night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who wast, who art, and who art to come!*

As the worship of God is uniformly burdensome to sinners here, the same worship must be at least equally burdensome to them there. Nay, it must be far more burdensome. The more holy, the more spiritual, any thing is in this world, the more loathsome, the more painful is it to the mind of a sinner. But all the employments of heaven are supereminently holy and spiritual. These then must be far more disgusting, than any thing which religion or its

worship can present to his view in the present world. In heaven therefore he would be far less happy than he is here. Every thing with which he was conversant, would more oppose his taste, contravene his wishes, and disappoint his expectations. Nothing would give him pleasure: every thing would give him pain.

If then a sinner is to be admitted into heaven, it is absolutely necessary, that he should have a new heart, a new disposition. Otherwise, it is plain that, amid all the blessings of that delightful world, he would find nothing but disgust, mortification, and sorrow.

3dly. *Such a change is necessary for the sinner also, in order to his becoming a useful inhabitant of heaven.*

All the inhabitants of that happy world are formed to *do* good, as well as to *enjoy* it. Their enjoyment itself is supremely the result of a disposition to do good, and of conduct in which this disposition is completely carried into efficacious practice. *There* is realized in the most absolute manner the whole nature of that perfect rule of righteousness, delivered by our Saviour, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive;* to do good, than to gain it from others. Virtuous beings are assembled here for the very purpose of exhibiting in their conduct the divine nature, and transcendent effects, of this evangelical rule of righteousness: and from their united efforts flows, in streams continually enlarging, universal, unceasing, immortal, good.

The good here enjoyed, is a common, or public, good; in which one great and general interest is proposed, and pursued; and to which all private, personal interests are cheerfully subordinated. No selfish affection operates here: no selfish purpose exists. Every mind is expanded with affections, all embracing the common interest. Every design is elevated to a happiness rendered noble and supreme, because it is universal. To this object every pulse beats; every heart thrills; every tongue vibrates. On it, as if magnetically influenced, every eye is fixed: to it every hand is turned.

But every sinner would feel, that *all these things were against him.* His affections are only selfish; and his designs concentre solely in private, separate ends, and in interests opposed to the general welfare. His only scheme

of happiness also is to gain enjoyment from others, and never to find it in doing good to others. This is a subject, of which, as a source of enjoyment, he forms not a single conception. All his plans for happiness are matters of mere bargain and sale; in every instance of which he intends to get the advantage of those, with whom he deals. Good, to him, is good, only when it is separate and selfish; and he knows not what it is to see his own happiness enlarged by the general participation.

In the great, commanding, and sole pursuit of the heavenly world a sinner would be unable to unite at all. Every wish of his heart must oppose the wishes and designs of all around him, and the great object, for which heaven itself was formed by the Creator; which renders it delightful in his eye; and for which he has gathered into it the assembly of the first-born. Of course, he would be alone; separated from his companions by a character totally opposite to theirs; hostile to them in all his wishes and pursuits; marked by them as an alien; despised as useless and worthless; pitied as miserable; and loathed as sinful.

Sin is the real and only cause of the wretchedness experienced in the present world; and the immediate as well as the original cause of the woes experienced in the regions of perdition. Were sinners admitted into heaven, the same lust, fraud, and cruelty; the same injustice, oppression, and violence: in a word, the same wickedness and woe, which prevail in *this* world, would revive in *that*. Of course, the whole system of happiness begun there, and intended to be carried on throughout eternity, would be either prevented, or destroyed. That God should permit these evils to exist, is incredible, and in my view impossible.

4thly. *It is absolutely necessary that this change should be accomplished in this present world.*

The present state is to man the only state of probation. All beyond the grave is a state of reward. The reward ought plainly to be such, as to suit the character of every probationer; a true testimony of God to his real character; a reward, such as he has merited; and such as a righteous God may be expected to bestow. Of course the testimony actually given, must be a testimony to the character, with

which he leaves this world of probation, and with which he goes to the judgment.

Besides, man enters *that* world with the very same character, with which he leaves *this*. Death makes no moral change in man: but is a mere passage from one state of being to another; a mere dismission from *this* world to *that*, of the probationer from his probation. A simple termination of the animal functions, a mere separation of the soul from the body, plainly cannot alter the moral state of the soul, or change at all its views, affections, or character. Of this truth the Scriptures furnish abundant evidence. *Do*, says Solomon, *whatever thy hand findeth to do with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom*, in Sheol, the world of departed spirits, *whither thou goest. The night cometh*, saith our Saviour, that is, the night of death, *in which no man can work*. Both these are direct declarations, that both the work and the state, of probation, are terminated by the grave, and will never exist in the future world. Accordingly, no change in the character of man, either in the article of death, or at any succeeding period of existence, is indicated in the Scriptures. Of course every man will appear at the judgment with the very character, which he has when he leaves the present world; and in this character only will he be rewarded.

Accordingly the Scriptures teach us that we shall be judged according to *the deeds done in the body;* and *rewarded according to our works*, accomplished on this side of the grave. It is plain, then, that if men enter the future world, without being regenerated in this, they enter with all their sins upon their heads; and must be rewarded for their sins only. But a reward for sin can never be happiness. If then sinners are to be admitted into heaven at all, they must undergo this great change of moral character here; of sinners must become holy; must cease from their rebellion and disobedience; must bow their wills to the will of God; and must yield themselves to him as voluntary instruments of his glory.

II. *The reality of this change in man may be satisfactorily evinced in the following manner:*

1st. *It is declared in the Scriptures.*

Beside the evidence derived to the *reality* of regeneration from the absolute *necessity* of it to mankind, the Scriptures declare the existence of it in a great variety of forms. *Of his mercy he saved us,* says St. Paul, *by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who is made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.* To be sanctified is to be regenerated: and here it is declared, that *Christ is become, of God, sanctification* to all his children. *Ye have put off the old man with his deeds,* says St. Paul to the Colossians, *and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. Put off,* says the same apostle to the Ephesians, *the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind: and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.* In these passages of Scripture we are plainly taught the following things.

(1st.) That the natural character is considered by the apostle as differing from the regenerated, according to the full import of these two names; *the old man,* and *the new man:*

(2dly.) That the regenerated character is a new character.

(3dly.) That the assumption of this new character is equivalent to *being renewed, or created anew:* both of these expressions being used to denote it:

(4thly.) That the former character, or *old man,* is a corrupt character, conformed to *deceitful lusts,* or under the influence of such lust:

(5thly.) That *the new man,* or new character, *is created after,* or *in, the image of God:*

(6thly.) That *this image* consists *in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness.*

For we are his workmanship; created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Eph. ii. 10. Here the Ephesian Christians are declared to be *the workmanship of God,* as to their Christian character; and to be *created in,* or *through, Christ Jesus unto good works.*

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in sins, hath made us alive, together with Christ, or rather *by Christ.* Here,

the former state of the Ephesians is declared to have been a state of *death in sins;* and their new state is declared to be a state of *life;* and this they are said to have derived from God. But St. Paul himself explains the import of this passage, if it needs explanation, by informing us, that *to be carnally minded is death; and that to be spiritually minded is life and peace.* Saints also are said *to be sanctified, to be washed, to be purified,* by the Spirit of God.

It is impossible, that the reality, or the greatness, or the importance, of this change, should be expressed in stronger or more definite terms. Those who are the subjects of it are said *to be made clean, pure, and holy; to have a new heart, a right spirit; to be renewed; to be born again; to be born of God; to be born of the Spirit of God; to be made alive from the dead; to be created anew; and to be new creatures.* Can any language more strongly declare, that a real change is made in the moral character of man? That he becomes the subject of a character altogether new, and never belonging to him before? As a child, when born, has a new state of existence; so he, who is born of God, has also a state of existence equally new to him. As a thing, when created, begins then first to have existence; so he, who is created anew, begins then to have spiritual existence. Accordingly, St. Paul says, 1 Cor. xiii. 2, *Without love I am nothing,* that is, without holiness, the love of the gospel, I have no spiritual being; no existence in the spiritual creation, or kingdom of God.

2dly. *The reality of regeneration is clearly proved by the scriptural accounts of the first Christians.*

Of the conversion of these Christians, and their consequent character, we have ample accounts in the Acts, and the Epistles. Those who were Jews we know beyond a doubt were bitter and obstinate enemies, and furious persecutors of Christ and his apostles; hated the religion which *they* taught; were bigoted votaries of a religion consisting in mere external services; children of wrath, and children of disobedience. What the Gentiles were, is amply unfolded in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans; where they are declared by St. Paul to be lost in absolute abandonment and profligacy of character. Yet in consequence of the preaching of the apostles, these same

Jews and Gentiles assumed an entirely new character; and continued to exhibit it with increasing beauty throughout the remainder of their lives. Instead of their former fleshly works, enumerated by St. Paul, Gal. v. 19—21, they shewed in all their *conversation, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,* and *temperance;* the divine and delightful fruits of the Spirit of grace. Instead of persecuting Christians, they exhibited towards them all acts of kindness; and suffered persecution with them for the sake of the same glorious Redeemer. Instead of their former empty and merely ceremonious religion, they embraced the genuine piety and pure morality of the gospel. All their intemperance, impurity, deceit, injustice, pride, and bigotry, they renounced; and in their place substituted, permanently, the sober, chaste, sincere, equitable, candid, and benevolent, spirit of the Christian system. Through life, they exhibited this spirit in every amiable form; and, at death, sealed this unexceptionable testimony with their blood.

Now it is certain, that *an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things; and a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringing forth good things.* It is certain, *that a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, nor a corrupt tree good fruit.* In other words, the heart will always characterize the conduct. Whence then, let me ask, was the difference in the conduct of these Jews and Gentiles, *before and after* their conversion to Christianity? The only answer which can be given, consistently with these declarations of Christ, is, that their hearts, before corrupt, and proving themselves to be so by a life distinguished by all kinds of wickedness, were now made holy; and were proved to be so, by a life adorned with every good work. To add to this decisive evidence, if it can be added to, it may be observed that all the remaining Jews and Gentiles, who were not the subjects of this conversion, continued still to exhibit the same wickedness which their countrymen had also before exhibited; and were just as odious in the sight of God and of man.

3dly. *The same truth is abundantly evident in the present experience of mankind.*

It cannot be asserted, to the satisfaction of a rational in-

quirer, that the external, visible change in the conduct of a man, who before his regeneration has with a good degree of uniformity exhibited a conscientious, becoming, and amiable life, is, after his regeneration, so great as to convince the mind, that he has experienced this radical alteration of character. Converse, however, even with such men, in a course of intimate Christian familiarity; and you will always find a radical difference in their views, sentiments, and conduct; a difference realized by themselves, and obvious to *you*. On this subject a minister of the gospel ought to be allowed to possess peculiar knowledge; because he has peculiar advantages for acquiring it. Ministers converse in this manner more extensively than any other class of mankind: and have therefore more various, and more abundant, opportunities of gaining an acquaintance with facts of this nature. These opportunities I have myself enjoyed; and have here declared nothing but what I have often witnessed.

Yet these are not the cases which ought to be here insisted on. Instances less liable to doubt and misconstruction exist in numbers, amply sufficient to place the point in debate beyond every reasonable objection. Wherever known infidels, or other open and gross sinners, have suddenly and finally renounced, not only their false opinions but their evil practices; and have continued through life to profess uniformly the doctrines, and to exhibit regularly and increasingly the duties, of Christianity; the case becomes decisive; and must, unless we cease to reason concerning human nature and human conduct upon known and established principles, satisfy every candid inquirer. The conduct in both cases proceeds from the heart. The state of the heart, therefore, or its moral character, was in the one case as opposite to what it was in the other, as the conduct. The evil conduct proceeded from an evil heart; the good conduct from a good heart; and this change of the heart from evil to good, or from sin to holiness, is the very change which in the Scriptures is styled regeneration.

Among instances of this nature, Col. Gardiner may be mentioned as one; and the Rev. John Newton as another; both extraordinary, convincing, and, so far as I can see, unexceptionable. I have known a considerable number of

instances, scarcely less extraordinary; some of them by unquestionable information; others by personal acquaintance. Two of these were examples of habitual drunkenness, perhaps the most hopeless of all evil habits; and the reformation was so entire, and the piety so evident, uniform, and long continued, as to leave no doubts in the minds of sober men, acquainted with the facts. A third instance, well meriting to be mentioned, was a young man of superior talents, formerly educated by me in this seminary. He devoted himself to the profession of medicine; and entered upon the practice with advantage. This youth was not only a determined infidel, but an open scoffer at the Bible, Christianity, Christians, and most other subjects of a religious nature. All these he exposed with a pungency of wit, and keenness of satire, which few men are capable of employing, and which very few are willing to employ, in the same open gross manner. After some years, spent in this violent course of wickedness, he became seriously alarmed (I know not on what occasion) concerning his sinful character, and future destiny. If I remember right, he almost or entirely despaired for a time of the mercy of God; and considered his perdition as sealed. At length, however, he acquired hopes of salvation; and manifested in his conduct the spirit of Christianity, so evidently and uniformly, as to excite a settled conviction in the minds of those around him, that he was sincerely a Christian. With entirely new views and purposes, he then quitted the medical profession, and entered upon the study of theology. After some time he was regularly inducted into the ministry of the gospel; and sustained to his death, which happened about twelve or fifteen years afterward, the character of an able, faithful, and unblamable minister of Christ.

Instances, of this nature generally, I could multiply extensively; but the time forbids me to proceed any farther in this part of my subject.

4thly. *The state of Christianity in the world at large may be fairly adduced as a convincing proof of the reality of this change.*

The history of real Christianity is not to be sought for in the accounts given us of the life, policy, ambition, and violence, of such rulers, statesmen, and warriors, as have as-

sumed the Christian name. The real nature and influence of the religion of Christ, are not to be sought for in camps and cabinets, in courts and palaces. These are the seats of pride and luxury, ambition and cunning, wrath and revenge. Christianity here is only put on as an upper garment, to adorn the character, to comport with the fashion, or to cover unchristian designs. I do not intend, that this is always the case. There are undoubtedly good men to be found even here. But I mean, that it is much more generally the case, than a good man would wish, or be willing, it should be. When infidels take their accounts of Christianity from the proceedings of the great; from their luxury, state-craft, conquests, and persecutions; they do not, and probably intend not to do, any justice to the subject. In these accounts they impose on their readers, and perhaps on themselves. But they deceive no man of common candour, and tolerable information.

The real effects of Christianity on mankind are to be sought and found in still life, quiet society, peaceful neighbourhoods, and well-ordered families. Here a thousand kind offices are done, and a thousand excellences manifested, of which the great and splendid rarely form a conception; and which, nevertheless, present the human character to the view of the mind with an aspect incomparably more lovely than any other.

But even on the great scale of examination, Christianity has meliorated the affairs of this unhappy world in such a degree, as, if thoroughly examined, strongly to evince the truth of this doctrine. If we compare the state of the Christian nations, especially the most enlightened and virtuous of them, with that of the most improved Heathen nations; the only fair mode of instituting a comparison; we shall see ample proof of such a melioration of the human character, as can be justly attributed to nothing but this important change of the human heart. Christianity has removed, from among the nations who profess it, polygamy; the selling of children, as slaves, by their parents; the general and brutal degradation of women; the belief of the rectitude of slavery; the supposed right of masters to kill their slaves; the exposure of parents, in their old age, to be devoured by wild beasts; the same exposure of children by

their parents; the sacrificing of human victims; the wanton destruction of human life for amusement in public games; the impure, brutal, and sanguinary worship, practised in the regions of idolatry; together with many of the horrors of war, and captivity, and many other enormous evils of a similar nature. At the same time, it has introduced milder and more equitable government; established equitable laws, by which nations have, in a considerable degree, regulated their intercourse; given a new sanction to treaties; provided legal support for the poor and suffering; secured the rights of strangers; erected hospitals for the sick, and almshouses for the indigent; formed, with great expense, a rich variety of institutions for the preservation and education of orphans: the instruction of poor children; the suppression of vice; the amendment of the vicious; and the consolation of the afflicted. It has made better rulers, and better subjects; better husbands, and better wives; better parents, and better children; better neighbours, and better friends. It has established the rational worship of the one living and true God; built churches, in which all men do, or may, worship him, and learn their duty; and, with immense expense, has sent, and is sending, these blessings to the ends of the earth. Whence this difference? Not from the difference of light. The Greeks and Romans were sufficiently enlightened at least to have begun this progress. But they did not take a single step towards real reformation. All that can be said is, *their* wickedness was a little more polished, than that of their barbarian neighbours. No; it has sprung from that *honest and good heart*, which is not in man by nature, but is given him by the Spirit of God. Such hearts found here and there, like dispersed stars, seen through the interstices of a clouded sky, diffuse a feeble radiance over Christian countries, and prevent the otherwise-absolute darkness. Howard, intensely illumined with the benevolence of the gospel, shed a lustre over the whole Christian world. Inferior lights are every where scattered; and their combined influence is every where felt. Were the same character that of all men, the change in human affairs would be such, as to demand no arguments to prove a change of heart. As the state of things is, it is plain, that the spirit of the martyrs was not in their persecutors: the

spirit of Howard was not in Voltaire; the spirit of Alfred was not in Frederic II. He who cannot see this, is unable because he will not; and may be well assured, that under the influence of his present temper he has lost the power of moral discrimination.

SERMON LXXIV.

REGENERATION.

ITS NATURE.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.—JOHN III. 3.

HAVING in the preceding discourse considered the *necessity* and the *reality* of regeneration, I shall now proceed, according to the plan proposed, to examine its *nature.*

1st. *This change of heart consists in a relish for spiritual objects, communicated to it by the power of the Holy Ghost.*

By spiritual objects I intend the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier, heaven, angels, the word and the worship of God, virtuous men, virtuous affections, virtuous conduct, and all the kinds of enjoyment found in the contemplation of these objects; the exercise of these affections, and the practice of this conduct. The existence of these objects every man admits; and every man, at all conversant with human life, must admit, that a part of mankind profess to relish them, and to find in them real and sincere pleasure. A sober man must farther admit, that as the Creator of all things is infinitely more excellent than any other being, so his excellence must be capable, in the nature of things, not only of being perceived, but also of being relished, by intelligent creatures. No man who has any regard to his character as a man of sound understanding, will acknowledge, that excellence exists; and yet deny, that it is capable of

being perceived and relished. Nor will any such man deny, that intelligent creatures may perceive the excellence of the Creator to be plainly superior to that of any other being, and may relish it accordingly. It must also be easily and certainly seen, that, if we relish the excellency of the Creator himself, we cannot fail to extend the same relish to every thing in which this excellence is displayed: since this will be no other than relishing the excellence itself, as it is manifested in different forms. It must be obvious, therefore, that this relish for the divine excellence, once existing, must of course be extended to all the objects in which it is displayed, and to all those intelligent beings by whom it is relished.

It has been frequently supposed, that *the Spirit of God regenerates man by immediately creating in him virtuous volitions.* All the volitions of all moral agents are, in my view, as will indeed be presupposed by those of my audience who remember the sermons which I delivered on the nature of the human soul, the acts of the agents themselves. The Spirit of God does not in my view, when he regenerates mankind, create in them any volitions whatever; but merely communicates to them the relish for spiritual objects, which has been here mentioned.

When God created Adam, there was a period of his existence after he began to be, antecedent to that in which he exercised the first volition. Every man who believes the mind to be *something beside ideas and exercises,* and who does not admit the doctrine of casualty, will acknowledge, that in this period the mind of Adam was in such a state, that he was propense to the exercise of virtuous volitions rather than of sinful ones. This state of mind has been commonly styled *disposition, temper, inclination, heart,* &c. In the Scriptures it usually bears the last of these names. I shall take the liberty to call it *disposition.* This disposition in Adam was the cause whence his virtuous volitions proceeded; the reason, why they were virtuous, and not sinful. Of the metaphysical nature of this cause I am ignorant. But its existence is, in my own view, certainly proved by its effects. If the volitions of man are not immediately created, they are either caused by something in man, or they are casual. But they are not casual; for nothing is casual,

And even if some things were casual, these could not be; because they were regularly and uniformly virtuous: and it is impossible, that casualty should be the source of uniformity or regularity. There was therefore, in the mind of Adam, certainly a cause which gave birth to the fact, that his volitions were virtuous, and not sinful. This cause, of necessity, preceded these volitions; and therefore certainly existed in that state of mind which was previous to his first volition. This state of mind then, this disposition of Adam, existing antecedently to every volition, was the real cause why his volitions, subsequently existing, were virtuous. It ought to be remarked here, that plain men, with truth, as well as with good sense, ascribe all the volitions of mankind to *disposition*, the very thing here intended as their true cause.

In regeneration, the very same thing is done by the Spirit of God for the soul, which was done for Adam by the same divine agent at his creation. The soul of Adam was created with a relish for spiritual objects. The soul of every man, who becomes a Christian, is *renewed* by the communication of the same relish. In Adam, this disposition produced virtuous volitions. In every child of Adam who becomes the subject of virtue, it produces the same effects.

It will perhaps be objected to this view of the subject, that God is said *to work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* Phil. ii. 13. Indeed, this passage formerly appeared to me to indicate, that God exercised a different agency on the mind of man from that which has been here described. But an examination of the passage has convinced me, that my views of it at that time were erroneous. For,

(1st.) *The communication of this relish, is as truly followed by virtuous willing and doing*, as the creative act would be, which might immediately give existence to our volitions, and our conduct. If, then, God communicates to us such a relish or such a disposition, causing in us holy volitions and actions; he is as truly said to *work in us* both these things, as he could be if he immediately created them. The only difference in this respect is, that they are now *mediately*, and would be then *immediately*, the effects of his agency.

2dly. *The word here translated worketh, in the Greek* ενεργων, *inworketh,* which characterizes the nature of the agency, is in Eph. ii. 2 applied to Satan in this manner: *Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.* Now will it not be said, that *Satan creates* evil volitions in the minds of *the children of disobedience.* As the word is in both cases the same, it does not indicate of itself, in the objected passage, that the immediate production of virtuous volitions by the power of God is the thing intended.

I will only add, on this subject, that the relish for spiritual objects is that which in the Scriptures is called, *a new heart, a right spirit, an honest and good heart, a spiritual mind,* and denoted by several other names of a similar import. Thus *a good man out of the good treasure of his heart* is said *to bring forth good things.* Thus, also, *they who received the seed in good ground,* as exhibited in the parable of the sower, are said to be *such, as, in an honest and good heart, having received the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.* In these and the like instances, the heart is exhibited as the source of all virtuous volitions, desires, and conduct. This relish for spiritual objects is, I apprehend, this very source of those interesting things.

2dly. *This change of the heart is the commencement of holiness in the mind.*

The carnal mind, that is, the original, natural disposition of man, *is enmity against God; not subject to his law; neither indeed can be.* Before this change, therefore, there is no holiness in the character; no relish for spiritual good; no exercise of virtuous volitions; no pursuit of virtuous conduct. All these things begin to be chosen and to be practised, after they begin to be relished; and the first relish for them exists in this renovation of the mind.

3dly. *This change is partial.*

After regeneration the native character of man still remains; his relish for sinful pursuits and enjoyments still continues; and his relish for spiritual pursuits and enjoyments is never perfected on this side of the grave.

In this state, man exhibits to the view of the universe an object unlike any thing else which it has ever beheld. All

other intelligent creatures, so far as we are informed, are either perfectly virtuous, or wholly destitute of real virtue. But regenerated man is really virtuous, and yet really sinful: his true and entire character being a mixture of moral good and evil. This mixed character is presented to us by St. Paul in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, by the phrases, *the law in the members*, and *the law of the mind*. These, he informs us, are totally contrary characters, warring in the same soul against each other, and carrying on a continual controversy while life remains. We are, however, abundantly taught, that the holy or virtuous disposition, *like the house of David, waxes stronger and stronger;* and the sinful disposition, like *the house of Saul, weaker and weaker.* This increase of strength on the one hand, and this diminution of it on the other, is not indeed regular, constant, and always discernible; but it is yet irregularly progressive to the end of life. There are seasons, in which the *law in the members brings the law of the mind into captivity.* David committed adultery with Bathsheba. Peter denied his Master; and dissembled with the Jews that went to Antioch. John and James proposed to call for fire from heaven upon the inhabitants of a Samaritan village. The disciples, as a body, contended *who of them should be the greatest,* and all *forsook* their Master in the garden of Gethsemane, *and fled.* Still all of them were better men near the close of life, than at any preceding period. What was true of them is true of every good man. He will, upon the whole, improve through life; and will ordinarily, year by year, though not without various interruptions and backslidings, become a better Christian. Yet perfection in holiness is never found in the present world. *If we say we have no sin,* says St. John, speaking of himself and all other Christians, 1 John i. 8, *we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

4thly. *Notwithstanding the partial nature of this change, it is still the foundation of perpetual holiness.*

Verily, verily, I say unto you, saith our Saviour, *He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life;* and *shall not come unto condemnation, but is passed from death unto life:* or, as it is in the original, *hath passed,* that is, already, *from death unto life.* It na-

turally seems mysterious, that imperfect holiness should in this case be perpetual; when the perfect holiness of Adam, and the perfect holiness of angels, was terminated by apostacy. The explanation of this mystery lies, it is presumed, in this peculiar fact; that those who are the subjects of this imperfect holiness, are the seed promised to Christ in the covenant of redemption, as the reward of his labours and sufferings. It certainly is not in *the nature of the holiness:* for this in all the cases specified is the same. *It is not in the degree:* for that was greater in those who fell, than in those who endure. In those who fell it was perfect, so long as it continued. In those who endure it is always imperfect, and often interrupted by backsliding. *It is not in the nature of the subjects.* The angels, who fell, were superior in their nature to all men; and the perfect nature of Adam was superior to that of his sanctified children. Yet the perseverance of every saint, remote as his character is from perfection, is secured by the promise of God, and carried into complete and final accomplishment by the power of his Spirit. Of this enduring holiness regeneration is the basis; and the subject of it never ceases to be holy while he lives.

5thly. *This change is the source of new views of spiritual and divine subjects.*

These views united constitute what is often termed *spiritual knowledge, divine knowledge, spiritual light,* and *divine light.* As the opinions of divines, and other Christians, have been different concerning this subject; it will be proper to consider it with particular attention.

It has been extensively supposed, that the Spirit of grace regenerates mankind by communicating to them new, clearer, and juster views of spiritual objects. The understanding being thus enlightened and convinced, the heart, it is supposed, yields itself to this conviction; and the man spontaneously becomes, under its influence, a child of God. I shall not attempt here to describe the metaphysical nature of the work of regeneration, nor to define, precisely, the manner in which it is accomplished; nor the exact bounds of the divine and human agency in this great concern. Of these subjects I have not sufficiently distinct and comprehensive views, to undertake this employment

with any satisfactory hope of success. Yet it appears to me clear, that the account, which I have now given of this subject, is not scriptural, nor just. Without a *relish* for spiritual objects, I cannot see that any discoveries concerning them, however clear and bright, can render them pleasing to the soul. If they are unpleasing in their very nature, they cannot be made agreeable by having that nature unfolded more clearly. He who disrelishes the taste of wine, will not relish it the more, the more distinctly and perfectly he perceives that taste. Nor will any account of its agreeableness to others, however clearly given, and with whatever evidence supported, render the taste agreeable to him. To enable him to relish it, it seems indispensable, that his own taste should be changed, and in this manner fitted to realize the pleasantness of the wine. *Light* is either evidence, or the perception of it; evidence of the true nature of the object which is contemplated, or the percepception of that evidence. But the great difficulty in the present case is this; the nature of the object perceived is disrelished. The more then it is perceived, the more it must be disrelished of course, so long as the present taste continues. It seems, therefore, indispensable, that in order to the usefulness of such superior light to the mind, its relish with respect to spiritual objects should first be changed. In this case, the clearer and brighter the views of such objects are, the more pleasing they may be expected to become to the mind.

This, I apprehend, is the true progress of this work in the human soul. A relish for all spiritual objects, never before existing in him, is communicated to every man who is the subject of regeneration by the Spirit of God. Before this event, he disrelished all such objects: now he relishes them all. Before, he was an enemy of God: now he becomes a friend to God. Before, he loved nothing: now he loves every thing of a spiritual nature. He who has hitherto been an enemy to a good man, disrelishes every thing which pertains to him; his character, conduct, conversation, and opinions; his family, his friends, his very looks, nay, even the spot where he lives; and, in a word, every thing which is his. If you undertake to convince him, while this disrelish continues, that the object of his dislike is undeserving

of all this; you may, indeed, present to him arguments which he cannot answer, and silence his objections by the irresistible force of proof. You may explain to him, in the clearest manner, the excellences of this object; and set them in such a light, that he may have nothing left to say against it. Should all this have been done, his dislike, in the case supposed, would still continue; his views, though enlarged, would be of exactly the same general nature: and his opposition to the hated object, instead of being diminished, would rather increase. We will now suppose this man to cease from his enmity, and to become a decided and sincere friend. A moment's thought will satisfy any mind, that with the change of his relish, a universal change of his views also will take place. The very same things which formerly disgusted him will now please him. What was formerly odious will now become amiable. The evidences of worth and excellence, which before silenced, will now satisfy him. His eye, no longer jaundiced, will see every thing in its proper native light; in its true character, importance, and desert; and will discern in what it was before unpleasing, deformed, or disgusting, a beauty, loveliness, and lustre, wholly new.

This allusion will distinctly explain my own views of both the source and the nature of spiritual light. When the relish for spiritual objects is communicated to the mind, the enmity of the man towards these objects is converted into good-will. He now becomes a friend to God and to his law, to truth and to duty. Over these and all other objects of the same general nature, he sees a new character diffused, of which before he did not form a single conception. Where they were before disgusting, they are now pleasing. Where they were before tasteless, they are now relished. Where they were before deformed, they are now beautiful. Where they were before odious, they are now lovely. The reason is, he now beholds them with new eyes. Before, he saw them with the eyes of an enemy; now, he sees them with those of a friend. The optics which he formerly possessed, spread over them an adventitious and false colouring, altogether foreign to their nature, and exhibiting that nature under a universal disguise. These optics are now purified; and he sees all these ob-

jects as they really are; in their true colours, their native beauty, and their inherent splendour. This is what I understand by *the spiritual light*, derived from regeneration.

6thly. *This change is instantaneous.*

This position has been as much controverted as any of those advanced in this discourse; but, as it seems to me, with no solid support either from reason or revelation.

The scheme of those who oppose this doctrine, appears generally to have been this; the subject of regeneration is supposed to begin, at some time or other, to turn his attention to spiritual concerns. He begins seriously to think on them; to read concerning them; to dwell upon them in the house of God, in his meditations, in his closet, and in his conversation. By degrees he gains a more thorough acquaintance with the guilt and danger of sin, and the importance of holiness, pardon, acceptance, and salvation. By degrees also he renounces one sinful practice and propensity after another; and thus finally arrives at a *neutral character*, in which he is neither a sinner, in the absolute sense, nor yet a Christian. Advancing from this stage, he begins at length to entertain, in a small degree, virtuous affections, and to adopt virtuous conduct; and thus proceeds from one virtuous attainment to another, while he lives. Some of the facts here supposed, taken separately, are real: for some of them undoubtedly take place in the minds and lives of those who become religious men. But the whole considered together, and as a scheme concerning this subject, is, in my view, entirely erroneous.

Were we to allow the scheme to be correct and scriptural, still the consequence usually drawn from it, that regeneration is gradually accomplished, is untrue. Regeneration, according to every scheme, is the commencement of holiness in the mind. Without calling in question the doctrine, that man in the moral sense is ever neutral, it is intuitively certain, that a man is, at every given period of his life, either holy or not holy. There is a period in which every man, who becomes holy at all, first becomes holy. At a period immediately antecedent to *this*, whenever it takes place, he was not holy. The commencement of holiness in his mind was, therefore, instantaneous; or began to exist at some given moment of time. Nor is it in the nature of

things possible, that the fact should be otherwise. All that can be truly said to be gradual, with respect to this subject, is either that process of thought and affection which precedes regeneration, or that course of improvement in holiness by which it is followed. But neither of these things is intended in the Scriptures, nor ought to be intended in the conversation and writings of Christians by the word *regeneration*.

It is often objected to the instantaneousness of regeneration, *that the change is too great to be accomplished in a moment*. Most of the persons who make this objection aim, I am persuaded, at what is customarily called by divines *the work of sanctification*; that is, *the Christian's advancement in holiness after he is regenerated*. This plainly is in fact, as it is exhibited in the Scriptures, a work which is progressive through life. It may well seem strange, for it certainly is untrue, that sanctification, in this sense, should be instantaneous.

By those who admit that agency of the Spirit of God in renewing mankind, which has been exhibited in these discourses, the instantaneousness of this change has, it is believed, never been denied. The act of turning from sin to holiness in the first instance on the part of man, and the act of communicating a disposition thus to turn on the part of the Spirit of God, are in their own nature so obviously accomplished in a moment, that it seems difficult to conceive how any person, considering them with attention, can have supposed them to be progressive. In the Scriptures, the accounts of this combined subject every where teach us, that it exists instantaneously. The phraseology, by which it is denoted in the Scriptures, strongly indicates, that this is its nature. It is exhibited to us under the expressions, *being born again; being created anew; having a new heart and a right spirit created within us; turning to God; turning from darkness to light*; and others of a like nature. All these expressions originally denote events instantaneously existing; and in their figurative application indicate the instantaneousness of the fact to which they are applied.

The same thing we are taught in the accounts given in the Scriptures of this fact, as having actually taken place.

Thus the *three thousand* Jews, who were converted by the first sermon of St. Peter, yielded themselves to God at that moment. Such also was the conversion of Dionysius; Damaris; Sergius Paulus; the jailer; and generally of the great multitudes whose conversion is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Such also was that of the nobleman of Capernaum; the father of the epileptic child; the woman of Samaria, and her fellow-citizens; and the thief upon the cross.

7thly. *This change, as to the time and manner of its existence, is ordinarily imperceptible by him who is the subject of it.*

There have not been wanting heretofore; *there are not now wanting; persons holding the name of Christians,* and those in considerable numbers, who profess to know the time and manner of their regeneraton, and to have been conscious at the time of the existence of this change in their moral character; and who accordingly recite all this to each other without any apparent doubt of the soundness of the recital; nay, who make this a subject of public investigation, with respect to all those who offer themselves as candidates for admission into their churches. By such men the existence of this change is considered as so manifest, whenever it takes place, that they are able to point out the day, the place, and all the attendant circumstances. From the confidence with which they speak on this subject, it has perhaps arisen, that many others who do not go the same length, still go a part of it; and believe in an indefinite manner, that these things *may,* at least, *be discerned and remembered with probability:* that they are to be sought for; that the want of being conscious of them, and of remembering them, is an unhappy event, not experienced by more favoured Christians; nay, by most Christians. Accordingly, the want of this knowledge and remembrance is regarded by such men, however exemplary their lives may be afterward, as involving a defect in the proper evidence, that they are Christians. However *good the fruit* may be which *they bring forth;* instead of determining by *the taste* that it is good, they feel unsatisfied with this mode of proof; and wish rather to rely on some discovery, which they consider as practicable, of the time and the place at which the bough producing the fruit was ingrafted.

All these are, I apprehend, opinions wholly unscriptural, and of course deceitful and dangerous. For,

1st. *The Scriptures no where refer us to the time or manner of our regeneration, for evidence that we are regenerated.* If the time and manner of our regeneration were certainly known by us; it is intuitively evident, that our regeneration itself would be equally well known. If this then were the case, it is incredible that the Scriptures should not, even in a single instance, refer us to so completely satisfactory a source of evidence, to determine us finally in this mighty concern; but should, at the same time, direct us to the so much less perfect evidence, furnished by the subsequent state of our affections and conduct. *By their fruits shall ye know them,* says our Saviour. *Then are ye my disciples indeed, if ye keep my commandments. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven, is my disciple.* These are the rules by which, together with others of exactly the same nature, we are directed in the Scriptures to judge of our moral state. But these rules are not only superfluous, but useless, if the time, the manner, or the fact, of our regeneration were ordinarily known by us. For these, and each of these, would furnish evidence of this subject, completely decisive as to the state of all men. He who knew these things, would certainly know that he was a Christian: he who did not, would certainly know that he was not a Christian. No other rule therefore could be needed, or could be ever employed. According to this scheme then, Christ and the apostles have devised an imperfect rule, to direct us in our decisions concerning this interesting subject; while uninspired men of modern times have by their ingenuity fortunately found out a perfect one.

2dly. *The relish for spiritual good, and the exercise of holy affections, are, at their commencement, certainly no more distinguishable, than the same relish and the same exercises, in the same mind, usually are afterward.* Men sometimes seem to suppose, that in *these first acts of a virtuous mind* there is something extraordinary and peculiar. All that makes them extraordinary is, that they are the first. In the degree in which they exist, they are usually among the least remarkable. There is, of course, nothing to make

them distinguished, except the mere fact, that they are the first.

But no person needs to be told, that the subsequent holy exercises are so far from being certainly known to be such, that they are, ordinarily, at the best believed, and in most instances merely hoped, to be of this character. If then the first holy exercises are not more distinguishable than the subsequent ones, and the subsequent ones are only distinguishable in such a degree as sometimes to be believed, and at most times merely hoped, to be of this character; then it is certain, that the time, the manner, and even the fact, of regeneration, are so far from being clearly known, in all ordinary cases, that they can never be relied on with safety, if considered by themselves only. Much less can they be regarded with undoubting confidence.

3dly. *Multitudes of those who have professed, with much apparent assurance, to know all these things concerning themselves, have afterward fallen off, and become sometimes lukewarm professors of Christianity, and sometimes open apostates.* This fact, which is by no means uncommon among persons holding the opinion here censured, clearly proves, that the reliance which is placed on the knowledge professed, is often unfounded, and may be always. That, which has frequently deceived *our fellow-men*, ought ever to be supposed to be capable of deceiving *us*.

The truth is, the infusion of a relish for divine things into the mind is *a breathing of the Spirit of life on dry bones*, perceivable only by its effects: like the communication of the animating principle to the embryo, real, yet not discernible in itself, but in the consequences which it produces. Were the case otherwise, St. Paul could never have asked the Corinthian Christians, *Know ye not your ownselves?* nor directed them to *prove themselves, whether they were in the faith*. Were the contrary opinion just, this apostle would certainly have appealed to the time, place, and manner, of his own regeneration, which were probably better known to him, than the same things ever were to any child of God, as proofs of the fact, that he was regenerated. But this he never does. On the contrary, the evidence on which he relied, was furnished by the fruits of holiness apparent in his life.

REMARKS.

From the observations which have been made concerning this subject, it is evident, *that the work of regeneration is worthy of the Spirit of God.*

Regeneration is a change of the temper, or disposition, or, in other words, *of the heart of man; and, by consequence, of his whole character.* The heart is the great controlling power of a rational being; the whole of that energy by which he is moved to action. The moral nature of this power, therefore, will be the moral nature of the man. If this be virtuous, all his other faculties will be rendered means of virtue; if sinful, the means of sin. Thus regeneration will affect the whole man; and govern all his character, powers, and conduct.

Regeneration is of the highest importance to man, as a subject of the divine government. With his former disposition, he was a rebel against God: with this, he becomes cheerfully an obedient subject. Of an enemy he becomes a friend; of an apostate he becomes a child. His obedience is henceforth filial, accepted of God, and useful to the universe. From the debased, hateful, miserable character of sin he makes a final escape; and begins the glorious and eternal career of virtue. The deformity, disgrace, and contempt, of which sin is the parent and the substance, he exchanges for moral excellence, loveliness, and beauty.

With his character, his destination is equally changed. In his native condition he was a child of wrath, an object of abhorrence, and an heir of woe. Evil, in an unceasing and interminable progress, was his lot; the regions of sorrow and despair, his everlasting home; and fiends, and fiend-like men, his eternal companions. His own bosom was the house of remorse; while a conscience, unceasingly wounded by his sin, held up to his eye the image of guilt and the predictions of misery; and filled him with immoveable terror and amazement. On his character good beings looked with detestation, and on his ruin with pity: while evil beings beheld both with that satanic pleasure, which a reprobate mind can enjoy at the sight of companionship in turpitude and destruction.

But when he becomes the subject of this great and happy

change of character, all things connected with him are also changed. His unbelief, impenitence, hatred of God, rejection of Christ, and resistance to the Spirit of grace, he has voluntarily and ingenuously renounced. No more rebellious, impious, or ungrateful, he has assumed the amiable spirit of submission, repentance, confidence, hope, gratitude, and love. The image of his Maker is instamped on his mind; and begins there to shine with moral and eternal beauty. The seeds of immortality have there sprung up, as in a kindly soil; and, warmed by the lifegiving beams of the Sun of righteousness, and refreshed by the dewy influence of the Spirit of grace, rise, and bloom, and flourish, with increasing vigour. In him, sin, and the flesh, and the world, daily decay; and daily announce their approaching dissolution: while the soul continually assumes new life and virtue, and is animated with superior and undying energy. He is now a joint heir with Christ, and the destined inhabitant of heaven. The gates of glory and of happiness are already opened to receive him; and the joy of saints and angels has been renewed over his repentance. All around him is peace; all before him purity and transport. God is his Father; Christ his Redeemer; and the Spirit of truth his Sanctifier. Heaven is his eternal habitation; virtue is his immortal character: and seraphim, and cherubim, and all the children of light, are his companions for ever. Henceforth he becomes, of course, a rich blessing to the universe. All good beings, nay, God himself, will rejoice in him for ever, as a valuable accession to the great kingdom of righteousness, as a real addition to the mass of created good, and as an humble, but a faithful, and an honourable, instrument of the everlasting praise of heaven. He is a vessel of infinite mercy; an illustrious trophy of the cross; a gem in the crown of glory, which adorns the Redeemer of mankind.

Of all these sublime attainments, these exalted blessings, these divine allotments, regeneration is the beginning. What then can be more worthy of the Spirit of truth? What effort in creation, what event in providence, is more becoming his character? The rise of an empire, the formation of a world, is a poor and an humble display of infinite perfection, compared with the sanctification of an immortal

mind. In the progress of eternity, one such mind will enjoy more good, exercise more virtue, and display more excellency of character, than this great world of men has ever enjoyed, exercised, or displayed. Accordingly, God himself divinely characterizes this illustrious work in the following magnificent terms. *For behold I create new heavens, and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, neither come into mind. But be ye glad, and rejoice for ever, in that which I create; for behold! I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and my people a joy.* Of such importance and glory is the new creation, or regeneration, of the soul of man, that, in comparison with it, the original formation of the heavens and the earth is, in the divine eye, unworthy even of being remembered. It was, therefore, a work proper for God the Father to contrive; for God the Son to procure even with his own death; and for God the Holy Spirit to accomplish with his life-giving and almighty power in the souls of the guilty, ruined, and perishing children of Adam.

SERMON LXXV.

REGENERATION.

ITS ANTECEDENTS.

Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas: and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?—ACTS XVI. 29, 30.

HAVING, in the two preceding discourses, considered *the necessity, the reality, and the nature, of regeneration*, I shall now proceed to give *a history of this important work, as it usually exists in fact*; and shall attempt *to exhibit its antecedents, its attendants, and its consequents. The first* of these subjects shall occupy the present discourse.

The text is a part of the story of *the jailer*, to whose charge Paul and Silas were committed by the magistrates of Philippi, with a particular direction, that he should *keep them safely*. To comply with this direction *he thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.* In this situation at midnight, *they prayed and sang praises to God. Suddenly there was a great earthquake; so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's hands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison-doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm; for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas; and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*

The man who is the principal subject of this story had been educated a Heathen, and, until a short time before the events specified in it took place, was totally ignorant of the Christian religion. Within this period he must have been present, and I think not unfrequently, at the preaching of Paul and Silas: otherwise he could not have known, that there was such a thing as salvation. Probably he was induced, in common with his fellow-citizens, to hear their discourses merely as a gratification of curiosity. Whatever was the motive, it is plain he had gained some knowledge of a Saviour; and had learned, that through him men might, in some manner or other, be saved.

The things which he had known concerning these subjects, seem not however to have made any very deep impressions on his mind. Before the extraordinary events recorded in the verses immediately preceding the text, he appears not to have conversed with these ministers about his religious concerns, nor to have felt any peculiar anxiety concerning his guilt or his danger. On the contrary, we cannot hesitate to consider him, as clearly proved, by his severe treatment of them, to have been hitherto in a state of religious unconcern, a state of sinful coldness and quietude.

But at this time a change was wrought in the man, great

and wonderful; a change manifested in his conduct with the most unequivocal evidence. By what was this change accomplished? What was it, that of a Heathen made this man a Christian? Was the cause found in the miraculous events by which the change was immediately preceded? It would seem, that many others, who were equally witnesses of these events, still continued to be heathen, and experience no alteration of character. Beyond this, it is evident from the story, that the jailer did not witness them at all, and that he did not awake out of sleep until after the earthquake and all its alarming effects had terminated. Besides, when he had awakened, and concluded that the prisoners had made their escape, he determined to kill himself: an effort which refutes the supposition, that he had any just moral apprehensions, and proves him to have been solicitous only concerning his responsibility to the magistrates. He had, indeed, heard Paul and Silas preach; so had many others, who still continued to be heathen. Preaching therefore did not alone accomplish this change, otherwise it would have accomplished it in *them* also. An influence not common to others must have been felt by him; an influence, never felt by himself before, must now have produced this mighty alteration in his character.

The text presents him to us in the utmost agitation and distress, and as thus agitated and distressed concerning his *salvation. He called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas; and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* A little before, he had *thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.* Immediately before he was on the point of committing suicide; a gross and dreadful crime, which would have ruined him for ever. A little before, nay, immediately before, he was a Heathen; regardless of salvation; a foe to Christianity; and the hard-handed jailer of these ministers of the gospel.

But now he bade adieu to all these dispositions and practices at once; renounced his former heathenism and sin; and became a meek, humble, and pious follower of the Redeemer. Now he fell down at the feet of his prisoners, and

relied implicitly on them for direction concerning his eternal well-being.

A description of the state of this man's mind, in the progress of his regeneration, must, in substance, be a description of the state of every mind, with respect to the same important subject. The events preceding the work of regeneration are substantially the same in every mind: the work itself is the same; and its consequences are the same.

The first great division of this work, *viz.* what I have mentioned as *the antecedents of regeneration*, is commonly called *conviction of sin.* Of this subject the text is a strong illustration; and will very naturally conduct our thoughts to every thing which will be necessary to it on the present occasion. The jailer plainly laboured under powerful and distressing conviction of his own sin, and of the danger with which it was attended. Of this truth his conduct furnishes the most affecting proof. The state of mind which he experienced, and which this passage of Scripture describes, it is the design of this discourse to exhibit, under the following heads:

I. *The course,*
II. *The nature,* and,
III. *The consequences, of conviction of sin.*

I. *The peculiar cause of this conviction is the law of God.*

By the law, saith St. Paul, *is the knowledge of sin.* As *sin is* merely *a transgression of the law,* and as *where no law is there is no transgression,* it is clear beyond a question, that all knowledge of sin must be derived from the law. To discern that we are sinful, we must of course know the rule of obedience; and, comparing our conduct with that rule, must see in this manner, that our conduct is not conformed to the rule. In this way all knowledge of sin is obtained.

This, however, is not an account of the knowledge of sin intended by *conviction;* as that word is customarily used by divines. The great body of sinners under the gospel have, in some degree at least, this knowledge; and yet are not justly said to be convinced.

Conviction of sin denotes something beyond the common

views of the mind concerning its sins; and is always *a serious, solemn, heart-felt sense of their reality, greatness, guilt, and danger.* This all sinners under the gospel have not; as every man knows who possesses a spirit of common observation; and peculiarly every man who becomes a subject of this conviction. Every such man knows, that in his former ordinary state he had no such sense of sin.

To explain this subject, it is necessary to observe, that there is a total difference between merely *seeing or understanding* a subject, *and feeling* it. A man may contemplate, as a mere object of speculation and intellect, the downward progress of his own affairs towards bankruptcy and ruin; and have clear views of its nature and certainty; and still regard it as an object of mere speculation. Should he afterward become a bankrupt, and thus be actually ruined, he will experience a state of mind entirely new, and altogether unlike any thing which he experienced before. He now *feels the subject:* before he only *thought on it with cool contemplation;* and, however clear his views were, they had no effect on his heart. His former views never moved him to a single effort for the prevention of his ruin; those which he now possesses would have engaged him, had they existed at the proper time for this purpose, in the most vigorous exertions. Just such is the difference between the common views of sin, and those which are experienced under religious conviction. What before was only seen, is now realized and felt.

This also is accomplished by the law; felt as well as understood; brought home to the heart, and strongly realized by the sinner. This fact is thus forcibly described by St. Paul: *For I was alive without the law once: but, when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. He was alive,* that is, in his own feelings, while he was *without the law;* or while the law was no more realized, than it is acknowledged to be the law of God, but not seriously regarded, applied to themselves, nor felt to be a rule of duty, obliging them indispensably to obey.

But when the commandment came.—The commandment was before at a distance, scarcely seen, and scarcely regarded; but now *came* home to him; to his sober thoughts; his realizing apprehensions.

Sin revived. Sin began then first to be perceived to be his true and distressing character. It arose out of the torpid state in which it had seemed to exist before; and assumed new life, strength, and terror. Of consequence, he who had hitherto considered himself, while he was inattentive to the nature and extent of the divine law, as a just man, safe and acceptable to God, now *died;* now perceived himself to be a great and guilty sinner, condemned and perishing; and all his former safety, righteousness, and life, vanished in a moment.

Under conviction of sin, the law is applied by the sinner to himself, and considered as the rule of his own duty; the rule by which his character is hereafter to be tried; and the rule by which *he himself is now to try it.* Before this no such views of the law had entered his mind: no such trial had ever been made. In this trial, the law is often solemnly, critically, and effectually, examined. Both its precepts and penalties are brought home, irresistibly, to the heart. Before, they were things with which the sinner had little or no concern. Now he finds them to be things with which he is more deeply concerned than with any other.

II. *The nature of this conviction may be unfolded in the following manner.*

In the ordinary circumstances of the mind it is usually disposed to acknowledge, that there is such a thing as sin; that it is in itself wrong, odious, mischievous to mankind, dishonourable to God, and deserving in some degree of punishment. It is usually ready to acknowledge also, that itself is sinful, and of course exposed to the anger of God. With regard to sin, as with regard to the law, its views are often, perhaps generally, just in a certain degree; but are loose, careless, and inefficacious; having no other effect on the mind, than to produce, at seasons rare and solitary, some reproaches of conscience, and a degree of regret and fear, feeble, momentary, and easily forgotten.

But when the man becomes a subject of religious conviction, he feels for the first time, that sin is a real and dreadful evil. For the first time, the law of God is seen to be a righteous and reasonable law, demanding nothing but what ought to be demanded, and forbidding nothing but what

ought to be forbidden. Its precepts and its penalties are both yielded to as just; and God is acknowledged to be righteous in prescribing the former, and inflicting the latter.

Himself he readily pronounces to be a sinner, universally debased, utterly blamable, justly condemned, and justly to be punished. Instead of self-justification and self-flattery, he is now more ready to pronounce the sentence of condemnation on himself, than on any other person; and is hardly brought to admit the pleas, advanced by others in palliation of his guilt, or in the defence of his moral character. Sin, and his own sins especially, now appear as things new, strange, and wonderful; as evils awfully serious and alarming. The law of God is now applied to himself as his own rule of duty; and obedience to it is confessed to be reasonable, indispensable, and immensely important. Every violation of its precepts therefore is regarded by him as a sore and dreadful evil; as guilt, which he perceives no means of wiping away; and as danger, which he finds no opportunity of escaping. An accumulation of crimes innumerable, and of guilt incomprehensible, is thus seen to have been formed by the conduct of his whole life, which, to the anxious and terrified eye of the criminal, has already swollen to the size of mountains, and ascended to the height of heaven.

These views, it is to be remembered, *are wholly new to the sinner*. Their novelty of course greatly enhances, in his eye, the terrifying and oppressive magnitude of the subject. All new things affect us more, when new, than when by frequent repetition they have become familiar. Before, he never in sober earnest believed himself to be a sinner. To find himself therefore to be not only a sinner, but a sinner of so guilty and blamable a character, naturally overwhelms him with anguish and dismay.

His mind also *is now exceedingly alarmed and distressed* by this afflicting discovery. *On an agitated mind* all things with which it is concerned make deep impressions; deeper far than when it is at ease; and especially those things which produced the agitation. Such, particularly, is the fact *in this state of religious agitation*. For both these reasons, as well as from the real greatness and nature

of his guilt, the convinced man is often ready to believe, that no sinner was ever so guilty as himself.

It is not uncommon to hear persons, of no singular depravity, declare, that they are doubtful, whether Judas was equally a transgressor with themselves. I have heard doubts expressed by persons of more than common decency and amiableness, whether Satan was not less odious to God than they were: and this reason has been alleged for the doubt, that he had never sinned against forgiving and redeeming love. It is not to be wondered at, that the soul to which these awful subjects are thus new, and which is thus terrified by its first views of them, should be even excessive in its self-condemnation.

With the greatness of its guilt, *the greatness of its danger* keeps an equal pace. Scarcely any thing more naturally or more commonly occurs to the mind in this situation, than doubts, whether such guilt, as itself has accumulated, can be forgiven. *The mercy of God*, which is declared in the Scriptures to be *greater than our sins, to be above the heavens, to extend to all generations*, and to endure for ever, is often doubted, so far as the sinner himself is concerned; admitted easily with regard to others, and with regard to all or almost all others, it is still doubted so far as he is concerned, and is easily believed to be incapable of extending to him. Often he is strongly tempted to believe, that he has committed the unpardonable sin; and often and much is he busied in examining what is the nature of that sin. Instead of self-flattery, the only employment which he was formerly willing to pursue with respect to his spiritual concerns, and which he indulged in every foolish and excessive degree, he is now wholly engaged in the opposite career of self-condemnation; and not unfrequently pursues it to an excess, equally unwarranted by the Scriptures. Nor is he at all prone to feel, that he is now equally guilty of new sin in limiting the mercy of God, and in forming new kinds of unpardonable sins, as before, in presuming, without warrant, on the exercise of divine mercy towards his hardened heart.

All these emotions are also greatly heightened by the remembrance of his former stupidity, unbelief, and hardness of heart, his light-mindedness and self-justification, his

deafness to instruction, his insensibility to the calls of mercy, the reproofs of guilt, and the warnings of future woe. What before were his favourite pursuits, he now considers as the means of his ruin; what before was the object of his delight, is now the object of his abhorrence. That which was once his support is now his terror: that which he accounted and boasted of as his wisdom, he now considers as the mere madness of bedlam. Nor can he explain to himself, how such sottishness could ever have been his conduct or his character.

The Bible now, its threatenings and promises, its doctrines, precepts, and ordinances, assume an aspect wholly new; for the first time real, solemn, important; the only ground of his distress; and the only source of his possible comfort. The same truth and reality, the same solemnity and importance, at once invest the prayers, sermons, and other religious instructions, which he has heard from his parents, from ministers, and from other persons of piety. Why they did not always, and of course, wear these characteristics, is now his astonishment; why he did not covet them, listen to them, and obey them. *Madness*, entire and dreadful, he now readily acknowledges *was in his heart* from the beginning; and has hitherto constituted his only moral character.

It is not here to be supposed, that this is, *in form*, an exact account of the state of every convinced sinner. *In substance*, it may be considered as universally just. Some such sinners are subjects of far more deep and distressing convictions than others; convictions much longer continued; respecting some of these objects more, and others less; producing more erroneous conclusions, greater self-condemnation, deeper despondency, and universally more distressing agitation. Some minds are naturally more exquisitely capable of feeling than others; more prone to sink; less prepared to hope, to exert themselves, to reason, and to admit the conclusions, which flow from reasoning; less ready to receive consolation; and more ready to yield to these as well as other temptations. Some have been better instructed in early life; have been more conscientious, amiable, and exemplary: and have less to reproach themselves with in their past conduct. The Spirit of God

also may choose to affect, and probably does affect, different minds in different manners. Finally, some minds may be more surrounded by temptations and dangers, and at the same time furnished with friends less accessible, counsels less wise, and directions less safe, in this season of trial and sorrow. From these and many other concurring causes it happens, that in *form*, *degree*, and *continuance*, convictions operate very differently on different minds; nor can any human skill limit them in these respects.

It ought by no means to be omitted here, that there are persons, especially of a steady, serene disposition, educated in a careful religious manner, and habitually of unblamable lives, in whom the process of conviction is conformed in a great degree to their general character. These persons, to the time of their conversion, have, not uncommonly, no remarkable fears or hopes, sorrows or joys. Conscientiously but calmly they oppose sin; evenly but mildly they sorrow for it; and steadily, but with no great ardour of feeling, they labour in the duties of a religious life. In the account which they give of their religious views and emotions, there is little to excite any peculiar degree of comfort in themselves, or of hope concerning them in others. Still their lives are often distinguished by uncommon excellence. Their progress is not that of a torrent, now violent, now sluggish and stagnant, but that of a river, silently and uniformly moving onward, and never delaying its course a moment in its way towards the ocean. In these persons a critical eye may discern a fixed, unwarping love of their duty, a perpetual repetition of good works, a continual advance towards the consummation of the Christian character.

In substance, however, this work is the same in all minds. All really discern the importance, reasonableness, and justice, of the divine law; their own violations of its precepts; the guilt which they have in this manner incurred; the righteousness of God in punishing them for it; and the extreme danger to which they are therefore exposed. No sinner can turn from sin to holiness, without seeing the evil and danger of the one, and the excellence and safety of the other. No sinner can turn from sin to holiness, without knowing and acknowledging *his own sin and danger*; the reason-

ableness of the divine law; and the justice of God in punishing his transgressions.

III. *The immediate consequences of this conviction next demand our attention.*

On this subject it is necessary to observe in the beginning, that the sinner is still altogether a sinner. The only difference between his present and former character is, that before he was an *unconvinced*, and now a *convinced* sinner. Before, he was ignorant of his true character: now he understands it clearly.

Hence it will be remembered, all his resolutions, efforts, and conduct, will partake of his general character; and will of course be sinful. Between his conscience and his affections, there is now a more complete and open opposition than ever before. His conscience justifies God, approves of the divine law, and in spite of himself acquiesces in his condemnation; but his heart is still utterly opposed to all these things, and usually more opposed to them than ever.

He is indeed afraid to sin; but it is because he dreads the punishment annexed to it; not because he hates the sin. Nor is it an unknown, nor probably a very unfrequent case, that these very fears become to him motives to continue in sin, and even to give himself up wholly to sinning. Under the influence of his fears, he is not unfrequently disposed to conclude, that there is no hope for him; and that therefore he may as well, and even better, indulge himself in wickedness, than attempt a repentance and reformation, which his deceitful heart, and probably all his spiritual enemies, represent as too late, and therefore fruitless. From this danger some, it is not improbable, never escape; but *return like the dog to his vomit, and like the sow, that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.* Still, I apprehend, this is very far from being a common case. A very small number only, as I believe, compared with the whole, yield themselves up to ruin in this deplorable manner. Perhaps no one, who persisted in his efforts to gain eternal life, was ever finally deserted by the Spirit of grace.

To such, as perseveringly continue in their endeavours, the next natural step in their progress, the first great conse-

quence of conviction of sin, is to inquire most earnestly *what they shall do to be saved.* Of this anguish, produced by such conviction, the text furnishes us with a very forcible example. No picture was perhaps ever more striking, than that, which is given us of the extreme agitation of the jailer, in the text. *He called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas; and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* An agitation not unlike this frequently occupies the hearts of others; and prompts them with the same earnestness to make the same solemn and affecting inquiry.

Antecedently to this period, the sinner has, in many instances, lived without a single sober thought of asking this question at all. *Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee;* has been his only language to repentance and reformation. The subject has never become seriously interesting to him before. Before, he has never seen his guilt, nor his danger. Before, he has not wished for salvation; has found good enough in the world, in sin, and in sense, to prevent all anxiety about future good; considered *this* as present and real; and regarded *that* as distant, doubtful, and imaginary. But now his danger of ruin, and his necessity of deliverance, appear in their full strength. In this situation, he makes this great inquiry with all possible solicitude. His happiness, his life, his soul, in the utmost danger of being lost for ever, are felt to be suspended on the answer. He beholds God, his own enemy, and an unchangeable enemy to sin and impenitence, now rising up to destroy him utterly, and to pour out upon him his wrath and indignation. In the deepest anguish he searches with prying eyes for a place of safety.

Here he first finds himself at a total loss concerning what he shall do. Here he first discovers his own ignorance of this great subject. Before he was *rich, and had need of nothing;* had eyes, which *saw* clearly *all wisdom;* understood all that he needed to know or do; and wanted no instruction nor information from others. Now he first finds himself to be, and to have been, *poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked, and in want of all things.* Now, instead of deciding on questions of the greatest moment and difficulty

in theology, and deciding roundly without examination or knowledge, he is desirous of being instructed in small and plain things; and instead of feeling his former contempt for those who are skilled in them, he becomes humble, docile, desirous of being taught, and disposed to regard with sincere respect such as are able to teach him.

At the same time, he especially betakes himself to the source of all instruction in the things of this nature; *the word of God.* This book he searches with all anxiety of mind, to find information and hope. The threatenings and alarms, which before hindered him from reading the Scriptures, now engage him to read them. His own danger and guilt he now labours thoroughly to learn; and is impatient to know the worst of his case. Whatever he finds there recorded he readily admits, however painful, and employs himself no more either in doubting, or finding fault. To the former he has bidden adieu; the latter he knows to be fruitless. However guilty the Bible exhibits him, he is prepared to consider himself as being at least equally guilty. However dangerous it declares his case to be, he is prepared to acknowledge the danger.

In this distress, it will be easily supposed, he also *searches for the means of deliverance.* For these he labours with the deepest concern. Hence he reads, examines, and ponders, with an interest new and peculiar; with fear and trembling; with critical attention to every sentiment, declaration, and word; with an earnest disposition to find relief and consolation in any and every passage where it can be found. The Bible is now no longer the neglected, forgotten, despised book which it formerly was; but his chief resort; *the man of his counsel; the rule of his conduct.* To him it has now become, for the first time, the word of God, and the means of eternal life.

All the difficulties, which heretofore prevented him from being present in *the house of God,* have now vanished. The disagreeable weather, the personal indispositions, the indolence which seemed like an indisposition, the plainness of the preacher, the inelegance of the sermon, and the imperfection of the psalmody, keep him at home no more. In this solemn place he listens to all that is uttered; and watches all that is done. The *preacher's words* become *as*

goads; piercing to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, of the joints and marrow.

At his former listlessness he is now amazed; as well as at that which he still beholds in others around him. *The sabbath*, no longer a dull, wearisome day, of which the hours dragged heavily, and during which he could hardly find any tolerable means of passing the time, now becomes a season of activity and industry, unceasing and intense; a season, waited for with anxiety, and welcomed with hope and joy. *The sanctuary*, no longer regarded as a place of mere confinement, as the scene of tedious, dull, unmeaning rites, where grave people were believed to assemble for scarcely any other purpose except to keep gay ones in order, has now become *the house of* the living *God, and the gate of heaven;* the place where he expects to find, if he finds at all, an escape from death, and the way to eternal life.

In the mean time, *he cries nightily unto God* for deliverance from sin and ruin. Prayer, long, perhaps from the beginning of his life, unused, unknown, and unthought of, or, if thought of at all, and attempted, always a burden, now becomes his most natural conduct. He sees and feels that God alone can deliver him; and therefore irresistibly looks to him for deliverance; oftentimes indeed, with fear even to pray, from the strong sense which he entertains of his absolute unworthiness; and his unfitness to perform this first, most natural, most reasonable, of all religious services. Sensible how impure an appearance he must make before that God, *in whose sight the heavens are unclean, and whose angels are charged with folly*, he feels unwilling, like *the publican*, even *to lift up his eyes towards heaven:* but *smiting his* breast cries out with importunate anguish, *God be merciful to me a sinner.*

But he cannot be *prevented* from praying. His cries for mercy, and those at times involuntary and ejaculatory, are forced from him by the sense of his guilt, and his fears of perdition. They often break out in his walks, in the course of his daily employments, and in his occasional journeyings; they spring from his meditations; they ascend from his pillow. The question, *whether a sinner shall be directed to pray*, has become nugatory to him; and has been de-

cided, not by metaphysical disquisition, but by the controlling anguish of his heart.

During this season of struggling for salvation, it is no unfrequent thing for his despondency to continue, to return at intervals with more weight, and to sink him deeper in distress; according to the different states of his mind, and the nature of the different subjects which occupy his thoughts.

It is all along to be kept in view, that, as I have heretofore remarked, this state of things is very different in different persons; varying almost endlessly in manner and degree; in some instances comparatively calm, quiet, and of an even tenor; in others disturbed, distressed, and tumultuous. Still it is also to be remembered, that substantially it is the same.

During this state of mind, it is farther to be observed, the sinner forsakes, of course, many of his former favourite objects; especially his diversions, his gaiety, his loose companions, and his haunts of sin. These he now perceives and feels to be the seats and sources of temptation, danger, and sorrow. Hence he shuns them with vigilant care and lively dread; not from virtuous motives, but from the fear of rendering his case more dreadful and hopeless.

But none of his efforts give him rest. Neither his affections, desires, nor labours, are virtuous in the evangelical sense, or commendable in the sight of God. His sense of danger only, and his apprehension of the inestimable importance of escaping, originally asleep or dead, is now alive and awake. This feeling, and its necessary effects, constitute the only change in his condition. No real goodness, no moral excellence, nothing really acceptable to God, is yet begun in his mind, or supposed to be begun. To be sensible that we are sinners is not the result of virtue. There is no real goodness in being afraid of the anger of God. There is not necessarily any thing holy in acknowledging, that God is just in inflicting punishment which has been deserved. These things may all exist without any hatred of sin, any love to God, or any faith in the Redeemer.

The prayers which he daily offers up to his Maker, are not the offspring of piety, but of terror. The child who sees the rod brought out to view, and beholds correction at

the door, is ever ready to supplicate for pity and forgiveness, and to promise whatever may contribute to his escape from the impending danger. Yet he is not of course a dutiful child.

Still these efforts of the sinner are useful to him. No unregenerated man was probably ever convinced, except by trying his own strength, that he was unable of himself to perform virtuous actions; to pray, to serve, and to glorify God; unable I mean in this sense, that he has no heart, no inclination, to perform these duties; and that he will never possess a better disposition, but by the renovating agency of the Spirit of God. The more he labours however, the more clearly he will perceive his services to be essentially defective and really sinful. The more he prays, the more unworthy he pronounces his prayers. An unconvinced sinner always believes that he can pray in a manner acceptable to God: a convinced sinner readily declares, that he cannot pray in a manner acceptable, not to God, but even to himself.

In the struggle thus continued, and thus earnestly conducted, he learns how obstinate his sinful dispositions are, and with what hopeless difficulty they are to be overcome. Convinced at length that all his efforts must, without the immediate assistance of God, prove entirely vain, he casts off all his dependance on himself, and turns his eyes to God, with the feelings of Peter when beginning to sink, and cries out in *his* language, *Lord, save me or I perish.*

REMARKS.

1st. *From these observations we learn the use and influence of the law of God in promoting the work of conversion.*

The law evidently begins this work in the soul; or perhaps, in more accurate language, it begins and produces that state of thought and affection in which the soul is usually turned to God. Without *the terrors of the law* this state of mind would manifestly never be produced, unless the whole tenor of Divine Providence should be changed. Yet this, so far as we can see, is a natural and necessary prerequisite to conversion. The sinner entirely needs thus to understand and feel his condition; his guilt, his danger, helplessness, and his absolute necessity of being re-

newed by the Spirit of grace. By the law alone he is enabled clearly to see, and strongly to feel, these interesting things. From the same source of instruction he learns the true nature of his own efforts; for it is by a comparison of them with this standard of perfection, that he sees how destitute they are of all real holiness, and how unavailing to recommend him to God. In a word, from the law only does he gain the knowledge, that he is spiritually *sick*, and stands in infinite need of the divine *Physician*.

2dly. *These observations also teach us the necessity, as well as usefulness, of that preaching which explains and enforces the nature of the law.*

It is not unfrequent to hear both preachers themselves, and many other persons, condemn the preaching of the law. These persons dwell much on the endearing benevolence of the gospel, the riches of the divine goodness displayed in it, and the importance and wisdom of winning sinners to embrace it. On the other hand, they censure with no small severity the preaching of the law, and those who in this manner attempt to alarm sinners concerning their moral condition. If the things which have been said in this discourse are admitted to be just; it must also be admitted, that these persons know very little of the important subjects which they handle in this free and unhappy manner. They must plainly be ignorant of the nature both of the law and the gospel, of the sinner's danger and guilt, the means of his deliverance, the nature of both conviction and conversion, the use of convictions towards conversion, and the use of the law in exciting them.

It has I trust been clearly shewn, that the law is absolutely necessary to rouse the sinner from his sleep of death, to point out to him his danger, and to induce him to seek for relief. To the necessity of the law for this purpose, the necessity of preaching it is exactly proportioned. Nothing else will accomplish the end. So long as this is kept out of view, other things will only soothe the sinner. If he views God as merciful without any regard to his justice, as forgiving without solid reasons; without an atonement, and without the application of that atonement to himself; he will be fearfully deceived; and trust in that mercy, on

terms and with views, agreeably to which it can never be exercised.

This method of decrying the divine law, and the preaching of it, is a dangerous method of flattering sinners to destruction, and of *sewing pillows under all arm-holes.*

Christ, the prophets, and the apostles, acted in a very different manner. They stung sinners to the quick; *pricked them to the heart,* with strong, solemn, and affecting representations of their guilt, their danger, and their approaching damnation; roused them from their slumbers; and forced them to listen, feel, and act.

The nature of the case shews the reasonableness and excellency of their example, and the propriety and wisdom of following it; while at the same time it holds out the folly of those who disuse, as well as those who censure, preaching of this nature. We need not be at all afraid lest sinners in *modern* times should be more easily affected than they were in *ancient* times. Their hearts are by no means peculiarly tender; but like the hearts of those who lived in former days, resemble the *rock,* and need both *the fire and the hammer, to break them in pieces.*

Some persons are probably afraid to preach in this manner, lest they should give pain to their hearers, and hazard their own popularity. These men either destroy or prevent much good, by standing in the place of such preachers as, like Boanerges, would thunder an alarm in the ears of sleeping guilt, and rouse the torpid soul to a sense of its danger.

3dly. *From these observations we also learn the necessity of the gospel to the accomplishment of this great work.*

If the sinner were left wholly to the law, he would sink and die; for it gives him neither encouragement nor hope. While the law is of mighty and indispensable use, to rouse him from his sloth, and awaken him to vigorous exertions for his deliverance; the gospel is the only foundation of hope that these exertions will be of any use. Without this hope he would do nothing but despair. It is indispensable therefore, that the gospel should follow the law in all sound preaching; that when the sinner is roused to inquire *what he shall do to be saved,* he may find encouragement in its

glorious promises and invitations. In this manner he learns, on the one hand, his ruined condition by nature and by practice, and on the other, that safe and happy state into which he may be introduced by the grace of God. Thus the adaptation and utility of the whole word of God to the purposes designed by it, are strongly manifest; the wisdom of all things contained in it, as the word of life; their excellency, their glory, and their resemblance to its Author. Thus also is it commended to our study, contemplation, wonder, and praise.

SERMON LXXVI.

REGENERATION.

ITS ATTENDANTS. GENERALLY CONSIDERED.

That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.—EPHES. IV. 22—24.

IN the last discourse, I described the *situation and conduct of a convinced sinner*. It is now my intention to exhibit *the conversion of the same sinner to God:* or to exhibit what in that discourse I called *the attendants of regeneration.*

In the text connected with the seventeenth verse, the Ephesians are commanded to *put off the old man with his deeds, and to put on the new man;* or, in a more strict accordance with the original language, *to cast away the old, and be clothed with the new, man.* It has been supposed, that the passage contains an allusion to the conduct of the new converts at their baptism; who are said at this ordinance to have cast away their old garments, as a symbol of their renunciation of sin, and to have been clothed with new ones, as a token of their assumption of holiness. It has

also been supposed, that the apostle alludes to the custom of actors, who changed their clothes whenever they changed their characters. The allusion is however so natural and familiar, that it seems unnecessary to look far for an explanation.

To put off the old man, and *to put on the new man,* are in the text, exhibited as equivalent to *being renewed in the spirit of their mind,* that is, to *being the subjects of regeneration.* This doctrine is still farther illustrated in the declarations, that the *old man is corrupt,* and *that the new man is created, after God, in righteousness and true holiness.* That to renounce the former of these characters, and to assume the latter, is the same thing with being regenerated, no person probably, who is acquainted with this subject, will dispute.

Under these two heads, then, I shall now consider *the farther progress of this convinced sinner;* viz.

I. *His renunciation of sin;* and,

II. *His assumption of holiness, as his future character.*

As these coexist in the mind, it will be unnecessary to consider them apart.

When the convinced sinner has, by a succession of earnest efforts to save himself, proved his utter inability to accomplish this important work; the next natural step, and that which he then becomes convinced it is absolutely necessary for him to take, is to cast himself wholly upon God. He sees himself perfectly helpless; and, if left to himself, utterly ruined. In the anguish of mind produced by this view of his situation, he casts himself at the footstool of divine mercy, as a mere suppliant; as devoid of any recommendation to the favour of God; as a ruined miserable creature; as justly condemned; as justly to be punished; as having no hope, but in mere forgiveness; as desiring salvation of mere grace and sovereign love; as without any power of atoning for his sins by any thing which he can do; as capable of being saved, only on account of the atonement of Christ; and as incapable of renewing himself, or of being renewed, but by the power of the Holy Ghost. All these things are *felt,* and not merely *understood;* not merely considered as being proved, or capable of proof, by sound argument. The several trials which the mind has made,

have of themselves become proofs of the highest kind, to which it now opposes neither objection nor doubt. Its views have been too clear to be denied or questioned; and the frame of the mind, its anxiety and distress, render it even impatient of the suggestion of uncertainty.

Self-righteousness is, therefore, now relinquished. The pride of saving himself, either wholly or partially, is now given up; and the sinner is humbly and easily satisfied to be saved by Christ. To his atonement, to his infinite compassion, he looks for the aid, which, though felt before to be unnecessary, he now regards as absolutely and infinitely necessary to prevent him from being lost.

When the sinner has come to this state of views and disposition, God in his infinite mercy usually, perhaps always, communicates to him *the new heart, the right spirit,* so often mentioned in the Scriptures.

It will here be useful, and probably necessary, to guard the minds of those who hear me against a common and very natural error concerning this important subject.

It has often been supposed, that in some part, or in the whole, of that process of the mind which has been here described, *there is something done of a meritorious nature;* something so pleasing to God, that on account of it he bestows this incomprehensible blessing. In my own view this opinion is wholly unscriptural, and altogether dangerous. If God gives the virtuous disposition intended, then it did not exist in the mind before it was thus given: and, as this disposition is the only source of virtuous action in the mind; it is perfectly clear, that there can be no such action before it is communicated. That God does in fact give it by his Spirit has, I trust, been heretofore proved. Antecedently to regeneration, then, there is no virtuous action in the mind, in the true and evangelical sense; unless we are to suppose two distinct sources of virtue, and two different kinds of virtuous action.

It will here be naturally asked, *What then is the true nature of this subject? What is the use of conviction of sin? Why does God communicate such a disposition to such sinners, as are effectually convinced of their sins, rather than to any others?*

In answer to these reasonable questions I observe, that

the use of such conviction is to bring the sinner to a just view of his own condition and character as a sinner; of the character of God, as his sovereign; of the divine law, as the rule of his conduct; of the character of Christ, as his Saviour; of the absolute necessity of an interest in his redemption for the attainment of salvation; and of the excellency and importance of holiness, in all its branches, as a moral character indispensable to entitle him to the favour and approbation of God. Without these apprehensions it would be very difficult to conceive how a sinner could become the subject of those exercises which belong to the nature of conversion to God. For example, how can the sinner, who does not clearly see the evil, odiousness, and malignity, of sin, ever be supposed to hate sin, mourn for it, or abstain from it in future periods? How, unless he discern the excellency and obligation of the law, as a rule of duty for himself, can he discern either the guilt of his transgressions, or the necessity and value of his future obedience? How, unless he be fully convinced of the justice and glory of God in hating and condemning sin, can he acknowledge God to be a reasonable or righteous sovereign? And how can he ingenuously and voluntarily turn to him at all? Finally, if he do not perceive his own helplessness, and his insufficiency to save himself, how can he betake himself at all to him for salvation? How, if he does not realize the fitness of Christ to be trusted with his soul, and all its concerns, as *able*, willing, and faithful, *to save to the uttermost, all that will come unto God by him*, can he believe on him, or trust in him, for these infinite blessings?

When God bestows the new disposition on the sinner, in the state above described, rather than in his ordinary state, he does this, I apprehend, not because the sinner has merited *this* blessing, or *any other*, at his hands; but because he has now become possessed of such a character and such views, as render the communication of it fit and proper in itself. *God never extends mercy to sinners, because of their desert or worth, but because they need his mercy.* When he sent his Son into the world to save the apostate race of Adam, it was not because these apostates had merited, but because they needed, such kindness at his hands. It was a mere act of grace; of free sovereign love. The commu-

nication of it was not a reward conferred on worth; for they plainly had none; but a free gift to mere necessity and distress. Christ *came, to seek and to save that which was lost;* and *to call, not righteous beings but sinners, to repentance. The father,* in the parable, did not admit *the prodigal* into his family and favour, on account of any services which he had rendered; for he had rendered none; but on account of the misery and ruin of his son, pleading strongly with his own compassion. Such I conceive to be the case of every convinced sinner, when he is made the subject of the renewing grace of God.

But there is a plain reason, why such sinners are made the objects of divine mercy, when they have arrived at a complete view of their guilt, danger, and dependance on God for sanctification and deliverance, rather than while they were at ease in sin, and self-justified in their rebellion. In the latter situation, they were utterly unprepared either to feel or understand the nature and extent of the divine goodness in bestowing these blessings; and of course to be thankful, obedient, humble, and universally virtuous, to that degree, which is necessary to their effectual preparation for heaven, and which seems incapable of being accomplished in any other manner than this which I have described. A deliverance is both understood and felt in proportion to the greatness of the sense which the person delivered has had of his danger. A new moral character is welcomed, in proportion to the feelings which have been experienced in the debasement and disadvantages of the character previously existing. Universally, every benefit is realized in proportion to the sense of our own necessity. Thus by the sense of his guilt, danger, and need of salvation, experienced under the conviction of his sin, the sinner is prepared with the utmost advantage to receive his sanctification, justification, and final deliverance from eternal ruin. *This is what I call the fitness of the sinner for the reception of these benefits:* a fitness which seems indispensable; appearing plainly to render it proper, that God should give these blessings to a convinced sinner; when it would be wholly improper to give them to the same sinner while unconvinced and insensible. Benefits are wisely conferred on those, who are fitted thoroughly to understand, feel, and

acknowledge them; and unwisely on those who are not; whose views are obscure, whose feelings are blunt, and whose acknowledgments, if made at all, are wrung from them by the hard hand of necessity. In the former case, the benefits may be said to be laid out well; in the latter, to little or no purpose.

These observations may possibly throw some light on a subject, which hitherto has been almost merely a topic of debate among theologians. This is, *the true nature and efficacy of the prayers of such persons as are under conviction of sin.* Some divines have strongly encouraged, and others utterly discouraged, convinced sinners from praying. Those of the latter class, founding their opinions on the declaration, that *the prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord,* observe that the prayers of convinced sinners cannot be acceptable to God; that they cannot reasonably be expected to be either heard or answered: and that, therefore, it is unjustifiable to advise such sinners, or any sinners whatever, to pray at all.

This subject will hereafter naturally offer itself for discussion. I shall now consider it only so far as my present purpose demands. According to the opinion which I have recited, no man can, with any propriety, pray for his regeneration. The sinner cannot pray for it, because his prayers are sinful and abominable. The saint cannot pray for it, with propriety, because he is already regenerated, and cannot possibly either need or receive it. Thus the greatest blessing ever given to man, and that on which all blessings depend, cannot be prayed for by him who receives it; and stands, therefore, on a ground totally diverse from that on which all other blessings rest; *viz.* on such a ground, that a man can never ask it for himself.

The prayers of convinced sinners, it is said, *are insincere, and therefore abominable to God.* In answer to this objection I observe, that a sinner, whether convinced or not, may undoubtedly pray with insincerity, in all instances; but there is no invincible necessity, that his prayers should always be insincere, notwithstanding he is a sinner. A sinner may, from a sense of his danger and misery, pray as sincerely to be saved from that danger and misery, as a saint. His disposition, I acknowledge, is still sinful;

and his prayers are wholly destitute of moral goodness. But the mere wish to be saved from suffering is neither sinful nor holy. On the contrary, it is merely the instinctive desire of every percipient being; without which he would cease to be a percipient being. That there is any thing hateful to God in this wish, whether expressed in prayer or not, I cannot perceive, nor do I find it declared either by reason or revelation It may indeed be united with other desires, and those either virtuous or sinful; according to the prevailing character of the mind in which it exists; and the whole state of the mind may be accordingly denominated virtuous or sinful. Still this desire is neither morally good nor morally evil; and, therefore, neither pleasing nor displeasing, as such, in the sight of God.

That God pities sinners, as mere sufferers, will not be doubted: otherwise he would not have sent his Son to redeem them from sin and misery. That he pities them more, when strongly affected with a sense of their guilt and misery, than when at ease concerning both, will, I think, be readily believed. The sinner is certainly not less an object of compassion, but much more, when feeling the evils in which he is involved; and I can see no reason, why he may not be more an object of divine compassion on that account, as well as of ours. The cries of the sinner for mercy are not therefore in themselves sinful; and there is nothing to make the sinner less, but much apparently to make him more, an object of the divine pity.

As the sinner knows, that *regeneration is the only possible mean of escape and safety;* so he may, and plainly will, feel in the same degree, the necessity of *regeneration* to him, as of *safety*. For regeneration, then, he will cry with the same ardour, and the same freedom from sinfulness in this prayer, considered by itself, as for salvation, or deliverance from suffering.

That the prayers of unregenerate men are not virtuous, must undoubtedly be admitted: for nothing can be virtuous, which does not proceed from a heart good in the evangelical sense. That they are sinful, so far as they are of a moral nature, must also be admitted, at least by me. The declaration of Solomon, that *the prayers of the wicked are an abomination*, appears to me, together with others of the

like import, to be *a description of the prayers of wicked men as they are in their general nature; and not as the mere cries of a suffering creature for mercy.* In these, considered by themselves, I see nothing of a sinful nature. *They are not indeed objects of the divine complacency;* and the sinner who offers them, is clearly an object of the divine anger. But I see no evidence, that *the prayers of such a sinner may not be objects of the divine benevolence,* and regarded by the infinite mind with compassion. *To that compassion only are they addressed.* The cries of a profligate vagrant in distress render him more properly and more intensely an object of compassion, and more especially entitled to relief, although he is still profligate, from a good man, than he would be, were he to continue insensible and hardened under his sufferings, and thus utterly unfitted to have any proper views of his need of relief, or the kindness of his benefactor in furnishing it. I see no reason, why God may not regard suffering sinners in a similar manner. That he does, in fact, thus regard them, is, I think, unanswerably evident: regeneration regularly following such prayers, and being regularly communicated to the subjects of them in the course of God's providence, whenever it exists at all. That this is ordinarily, nay that it is almost always, the fact, cannot I think be questioned. All sinners under conviction pray; and of such sinners all converts are made. To convinced sinners, crying to God for mercy, regeneration is communicated by the Spirit of God; and we are not, I think, warranted to conclude, that it is given to any others. As then the whole number of regenerated persons is formed of those who have been convinced of sin, and who have been diligently employed in prayer while under conviction; it is plain, that their prayers are not abominable in such a sense as to prevent the blessing prayed for from descending upon them; and therefore not in such a sense as rationally to discourage them from praying.

The prayer of the publican is, in my view, a clear and strong illustration of the justice of these remarks. There is no proof, nor in my opinion any reason to believe, that this man was regenerated. On the contrary, he declares himself, in his prayer to God, to be a sinner. As this declaration is put into his mouth by our Saviour; it

must, I think, be considered not only as a sincere declaration, but a correct one; expressing with exactness the precise truth. He was also a convinced sinner; as is evident from his own words, and from the whole tenor of the parable. Yet *he was justified rather than the* Pharisee. The Pharisee came before God with a false account of himself; with a lofty spirit of self-righteousness; and with an unwarrantable contempt for other men; particularly for the publican. The publican came with a strong and full conviction of his sin, and his supreme need of deliverance. With these views, confessing himself to be a sinner merely, he earnestly besought God to have mercy on him. His sense of his character was plainly just; and his prayer, being the result of his feelings, was of course sincere. Thus far I consider him as justified, and no farther. If he was regenerated in consequence of his prayer, and justified in the evangelical sense; the parable becomes completely decisive to my purpose; and furnishes all the encouragement to convinced sinners to pray which can be asked. But this I will not at present insist on; because it is not expressly declared; although, in my own view, it is fairly and rationally inferred from the strain of the parable.

These observations I have made at the present time, because the subject could scarcely fail of occurring to your minds; and because difficulties could scarcely fail of attending it, in the view of some persons at least, which it must be desirable to remove. Allow me, however, to observe, that divines, so far as I may be permitted to judge, have insisted on the metaphysical nature of this and several other subjects in such a manner, as rather to perplex than to instruct those who have heard them. To unfold or to limit, exactly, the agency of moral beings, seems to be a task imperfectly suited to such minds as ours. What the Scriptures have said concerning this subject we know; so far as we understand their meaning. We also know whatever is clearly taught us by *experience*. Beyond this our investigations seem not to have proceeded very far: and almost all the conclusions, derived from reasonings *a priori*, have failed of satisfying minds not originally biassed in their favour.

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From this digression, which I hope has not been wholly without use, I now return to the general subject.

When the sinner has come to this state of discernment and feeling, in which his character, danger, and necessity of deliverance, are thus realized; and has thus cast himself, as a mere suppliant for mercy, at the footstool of divine grace; God, as has been already observed, gives him a new and virtuous disposition, styled in the Scriptures, *a new heart; a right spirit; an honest and good heart; the good treasure of a good heart;* and by several other names of like import. That act of the Spirit of God by which this disposition is communicated; that is, the act of regenerating man, and the disposition itself which is communicated, I cannot be expected to describe. Neither of these things can, in the abstract, be known, or even contemplated, by such minds as ours. Not a single idea would ever be formed concerning the nature or existence of either, were they not discovered by *their effects:* or, as they are called in the gospel, *their fruits.* It may, however, be useful to repeat, that what I intend by this disposition, is *the cause, which in the mind of man produces all virtuous affections and volitions; the state in which the mind is universally possessed of a tendency to the evangelical character, or the tendency itself of the mind towards all that which in the character is morally excellent.* The existence of this disposition is proved by its effects; and in these only can it be seen. As these are new, and before unknown, it follows irresistibly, that the cause is equally new. This is also abundantly taught by the Scriptures; in which the disposition itself is called *a new heart;* the man, who becomes a subject of it, *a new creature;* and the life proceeding from it, *newness of life.*

The first great effect of this disposition, is the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The convinced sinner, as I have repeatedly observed, deeply feels his own utter inability to atone for his sins; to satisfy the demands of the divine law; and to reconcile himself to God.

All this, however, Christ informs him in the gospel, he is able, willing, and faithful, to do for him. In this situation, the sinner, for the first time, confides in these declarations

of the Redeemer; and in that moral character, which furnishes the evidence of their truth The scheme of saving himself, either wholly or partially, he has now given up; and is satisfied and delighted to be saved by Christ alone. His self-righteousness, so dear and delightful to him before, he now discerns to be nothing but gross spiritual pride; and so far from being praiseworthy, as to be the foundation of nothing but guilt and shame. Now he quits all designs of exalting and gratifying himself in this work; and becomes highly pleased with exalting Christ, by cheerfully rendering to him all the honour of his salvation. With these emotions, he receives Christ with all the heart; and confides in *him* for acceptance with God, as the only, and at the same time the most desirable, atonement for sin. Now if he *could* save himself, he would not choose to be thus saved; but sees a beauty and glory in the salvation of sinners by Christ, with which his heart wholly accords, and with which his soul is exceedingly delighted. He surrenders himself, therefore, into the hands of this divine Redeemer, confidentially, to be his here and for ever; to be governed by his choice, and to do all his pleasure.

The next effect of this disposition, is that which in the Scriptures is called *repentance unto life;* and in theological discourses, *evangelical repentance.*

It has been already observed, that the convinced sinner is, of course, deeply affected with a realizing sense of his sins, as being guilty, deserving the wrath of God, and the sources of ruin to himself. After he is regenerated, he, for the first time, begins to hate his sins, as odious in their very nature; as injurious to God, his fellow-creatures, and himself: and to loathe himself as a sinner. Now, for the first time, he begins to feel that he has been an ungrateful, impious, and rebellious wretch; opposed in heart and life to the government of his Maker; a nuisance to his fellow-creatures; and an enemy to himself. His character he perceives to be deeply debased; and himself to be *unworthy of the least of all the mercies* bestowed on him by his divine Benefactor: With all this is also united a strong sense of the odiousness and danger of every future sin; a sense which is continued through life.

All these things also, he spontaneously and ingenuously

confesses before God. Him he has injured above all other beings; and to him he wishes, especially, to make whatever satisfaction is in his power. Willingly, therefore, he humbles himself before his Maker in dust and ashes; and henceforth assumes lowliness of mind, as his own most becoming and favourite character.

The disobedience, which he thus hates and loathes, he necessarily wishes and *labours to avoid.* The obedience which he heretofore loathed, he spontaneously assumes, in a manner not less necessary, as his own future character. Unwilling now to wound himself, to injure his fellow-men, and to dishonour God, by the indulgence of his former guilty inclinations, he resolves henceforth to do that, and that only, which will glorify his Maker, promote the happiness of his fellow-creatures, and profit his own soul. To this great work, the end of all others, he consecrates himself with sincerity, zeal, and fixed determination.

The next fruit of this disposition is love to God. When the soul is regenerated, it begins to behold its Maker's character with new optics; and therefore perceives the character itself to be new, so far as its own views are concerned. It is now seen to be formed of such attributes, as wholly deserve, and most reasonably claim, the supreme love of every intelligent being. God becomes to the renewed man, a welcome object of his daily thoughts and meditations: an object, great and awful indeed, but also lovely and delightful. These two great parts of the divine character, being generally united in the view of the mind, produce in it *that regard to God, compounded of fear and love, which is commonly named reverence;* the affection in which love is more frequently exercised than by itself. In the same mind also the sight of his wonderful works, and more wonderful agency, produces *admiration;* a sense of his excellence, *complacency;* and the reception of his blessings, *gratitude;* and with these are inseparably united all the other affections of piety; *dependance, confidence, resignation, hope,* and *joy.* Of these some prevail at one time, and some at another; but all are inwrought into the very character of the soul, as primary parts of its moral nature.

These three exercises constitute what in the Scriptures is called conversion, or *turning from sin to God.*

The next fruit of this disposition is love to mankind. Evangelical love to our neighbour; that is, to all mankind, whether friends or enemies, is a characteristic of the renewed mind, as really new, and really unexperienced before its renovation, as *repentance* or *faith*. Whatever love it exercised to others, antecedently to this period, was either selfish or merely instinctive; in the former case sinful; in the latter possessed of no moral character, any more than the affection of brutes to their offspring. Now, the love which it exercises, is impartial, generous, and noble. Under its influence, the renewed man does that which is good, just, and sincere, because it is so; and because God has required these things in his law; and not from a regard to reputation or convenience. Now he finds the promotion of happiness to be desirable and delightful in itself, and, independently of a separate reward, to be done for its own sake, and not merely as it is done by publicans and sinners. The great question now becomes how, when, and where, good can be done; and not what he shall gain by doing it. Now also he chooses to do good by rule, and from a spirit of obedience to the rightful Lawgiver, and all-wise Director; and thus makes it the purpose of his life. Now, finally, he does good conscientiously, with contrivance and design; not accidentally, loosely, and rarely. *Towards Christians this love assumes a peculiar character; being made up of two great and distinguished exercises; the general benevolence, exercised towards them in common with all men, and that peculiar delight in their virtuous character,* commonly called *complacency*, and in the gospel, *brotherly love*. This is the object of the *new commandment* given by Christ in the gospel; and made the touchstone by which they are proved to be his disciples.

Of all these exercises of the mind it is to be observed, that they are *active exertions*, directed invariably, and al way, towards the promotion of real good; the spring of all excellent conduct within and without the soul. It is not to be understood, that *they exist and act in such a separate manner* as to be distinguishable, as to the times, and modes of their existence, or operations; nor that they actually take place in *that order in which they have now been mentioned*. Of this subject the Scriptures give us no distinct

account; and happily, as indeed, might fairly be concluded from their silence, it is of no serious importance to *us*. All which is really necessary, is, that they exist and increase in such a manner as is best in the sight of God.

As the regenerated man discerns his own unceasing need of divine assistance, and his general propensity to stop, and backslide, in his religious course; *he will necessarily, and instinctively, look to God for assistance, strength, and success.* *Prayer* will be the breath, by which he will live, and grow, and thrive. The closet, the family, and the church, will alternately be the scenes of his public and private devotions; the places where he will find hope, and peace, and joy; and where he will advance in all evangelical attainments. *To the Scriptures*, also, will he betake himself for the same aid. In them he finds God speaking to him; and declaring the very things which are necessary to enlighten his understanding, and to amend his heart. To the Scriptures therefore he will continually resort; and will make them the object of his investigation and reflection at all convenient seasons. *Nor will he be less employed in exploring the recesses of his own heart;* that he may learn, as far as may be, the moral state of his mind; his sins and dangers, the improvements which he has made in holiness, and the means of future safety.

In the like manner will the renewed mind *solicit, and lay hold on, the company, conversation, and friendship, of good men.* Their views of the Scriptures, of the danger of sin and temptation, and of the excellency and safety of holiness; their own affections and conduct; their example and prayers; their sympathy, communion, and encouragement; will prove ever-flowing springs of spiritual life and consolation. These are its own companions in the path of life; the disciples of its own Saviour; the children of its own heavenly Father. All its interests are theirs. One common cause unites, one common family embraces, one common Spirit quickens, and one God, the Father, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier, of all, loves, purifies, conducts, supports, and brings to his own house, both the regenerated man, and his fellow-Christians. In them therefore he finds an interest, a friendship, a kindred character of soul, which binds him to them with an indissoluble attachment. With

peculiar satisfaction he enjoys their company here; and with delightful hope anticipates their endless society hereafter.

Thus have I endeavoured summarily to explain *the work of regeneration;* and to describe *those immediate fruits of it,* by means of which alone it is discernible by man. As these apparently coexist with the work itself; I have in general language, called them *its attendants.* The name I confess is not metaphysically exact; nor will I insist on the entire propriety of adopting it. Yet as it naturally coincides with the views formed on this subject by the mind in which it exists, it seems sufficiently descriptive of what was intended for my purpose.

SERMON LXXVII.

REGENERATION.

ITS ATTENDANTS. FAITH. REPENTANCE.

Then Judas, who had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders; saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed and went and hanged himself.—MATT. XXVII. 3—5.

IN my last discourse, I gave an account of the work of regeneration; and particularly, of its immediate effects on the mind; which, because they apparently coexist with it, I styled its attendants. Of these I particularly mentioned faith in Christ, repentance, love to God, and love to mankind. All these exercises of the renewed mind are of such importance in the scriptural scheme, as to demand a distinct and particular consideration.

Faith, the first of them in the order which I have adopted, has heretofore been largely examined. In so complex a

science as that of theology, it is impossible not to anticipate particular subjects of discourse; because among several things which are collateral, and not regularly successive, and which are also variously connected, it becomes almost necessary to select, for reasons irresistibly occurring, some one out of the several connexions, which will prove in a measure injurious to the consideration of others. On some accounts, the natural order would have induced me to discuss the subject of faith in this place; on others, it seemed desirable to give it an earlier examination. As the mind can very easily transfer it to that period, at which, in the order of time, it begins to exist; the disadvantage will be immaterial, should it upon the whole be thought a disadvantage.

The next subject of consideration is repentance unto life; usually called evangelical repentance.

In the text we are informed, that Judas, after he had betrayed Christ, seeing that he was condemned, *repented himself.* It is therefore certain, that Judas was in some sense a penitent; yet it is equally certain, that his repentance was not genuine; or, in other words, was not the repentance which is required by the gospel. As one of the most useful methods of distinguishing that which is genuine, from that which is spurious, is to compare them; I shall, in the discussion of this subject,

I. *Examine the repentance of Judas;* and,

II. *The nature of true repentance.*

Concerning the repentance of Judas, I observe,

1st, *That it was real.*

That Judas actually felt, and did in no sense counterfeit, the sorrow which he professed for his treachery, and its consequences, is evident beyond a possible doubt: its existence being evinced by the highest of all proofs—its influence on his conduct. False repentance therefore, by which I mean all that which is not evangelical, has a real, and not merely a pretended existence. Of course it is not, in this respect, at all distinguished from the repentance of the gospel.

2dly. *It was deep and distressing.*

This also is equally evinced in the same manner. No

person, who was present to hear what Judas said, and to see the things which he did, could entertain a doubt, that he was exceedingly distressed by the remembrance of what he had done. False repentance may not only be real, but deeply distressing; and cannot by this circumstance be distinguished from that which is genuine.

3dly. *It was attended by a strong and full conviction of his guilt.*

This is also amply declared, both in his words and in his actions, so as not to admit even of a question. False repentance, therefore, cannot be distinguished from the true by this circumstance.

4thly, *It was followed by a frank confession of his guilt. I have sinned,* said this miserable man, *in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.* This confession he made before those to whom we should naturally expect him last to make it; *viz.* the very persons who had hired him to sin. It was also a confession extorted from him by a sense of his guilt alone, and not by any human persuasion, art, or violence. It was sincere: being not only really, but intentionally true: a frank declaration both of his views and of his conduct. Such a confession is therefore no decisive proof, that repentance is genuine.

5thly. *It was also followed, so far as was now possible, by a departure from his former conduct.*

Whatever motives, of a different kind, prompted Judas to his treachery, it is plain, covetousness had its share of influence. The attainment of money, he himself informs us, was an object primarily in his view. *What will ye give me?* said he to the chief priests: *and I will deliver him unto you.* The sum which they offered was indeed very small: still, it plainly operated with commanding force upon his mind. Nor need we wonder, that he who, when he kept the bag which contained the little means of subsistence on which, when not supported by hospitality, Christ and his apostles lived, could from time to time basely plunder so small a part of it, as not to be detected by his companions, should be induced to undertake a very base employment for thirty pieces of silver. But on the present occasion, covetous as he habitually was at all former times, he voluntarily returned the money which he had received

to the chief priests; and, in the anguish of his heart, overcame, for a season, this ruling propensity. Beyond this, he was desirous to do justice to the character of Christ. *I have sinned,* said he, *in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.*

6thly. *It was followed by the voluntary infliction of great evils upon himself.*

Beside the voluntary surrender of the money, which, if we may judge from what the attainment of it cost him, must have been given up with great difficulty, he went immediately away, and put a violent end to his own life: thus choosing to encounter the greatest evil which can be suffered in the present life, rather than endure the anguish of heart produced by the dreadful sin of which he had been guilty in betraying his Lord.

From this melancholy fact it is clearly evident, that no voluntary penance furnishes the least proof, that the repentance which occasioned it was genuine. *We may give all our goods to feed the poor;* nay, *we may give our bodies to be burned;* and yet it may *profit us nothing.*

From these observations it is unanswerably evident, that a false repentance may wear many appearances of the true; that it may in many respects be followed by the same, or similar, conduct; and that it may, on the whole, go very far in its resemblance; and still not be evangelical.

In other circumstances, the false penitent may exhibit, still farther, such resemblances in his character. Thus Saul, when he pursued David to the cave of Engedi; and David, by cutting off the skirt of his robe while he slept, had proved to him, that he had spared his life, when it was in his power to have killed him; was strongly affected by a sense of David's superior righteousness and benevolence; and exhibited a deep conviction of his own inhumanity and injustice. Nor was he, in a small degree, grateful to David for preserving his life, when so entirely in David's power. In the indulgence of this emotion, he prayed, and, so far as we can judge, wished for a blessing upon David. From this example it is evident, that under clear and strong views of sin, persons may exercise a species of repentance in which all these emotions shall exist, together with all the conduct naturally springing from them; and yet their repentance not be that of the gospel.

In proportion as any counterfeit approximates towards that which it is designed to resemble, is the importance of the discrimination by which its real nature is to be distinguished. Since false repentance, therefore, can in so many particulars approach towards the true; it is indispensably necessary to examine them both, in such a manner, as to acquire distinct apprehensions concerning their different natures. To complete this design I now proceed,

II. *To examine the nature of true repentance.*

Of this important evangelical subject, it may be observed, that it includes,

1st. *Just views of sin.*

Fools, or wicked men, *make a mock at sin;* that is, they regard it as a thing destitute of any real importance; as a trifle, about which they have no reason to be seriously concerned; as an object of sport and diversion, rather than of solemn, or even of sober thought. To these views of sin the convinced sinner, so long as his convictions continue, has bidden a final farewell. To his eye sin appears as a great and terrible evil, fraught with consequences of the most dreadful nature. But even *his* views are principally generated by an alarming sense of its dangerous consequences, rather than by any just emotions arising from its nature. The views formed by the penitent differ from both these. While he realizes all the apprehensions of the convinced sinner, he adds to them also, a new and peculiar sense of the importance of sin, *as an evil in itself.* To him it appears as a great evil, primarily, *as it respects God.* The character of God is, in his view, so great and so good, and his commands are so reasonable, that obedience to him appears supremely excellent and desirable, and disobedience supremely undesirable and unworthy. Both are estimated by his eyes with a steady reference to the glorious character of the Creator; the excellence and importance of the law, by which he governs the universe; the auspicious efficacy of obedience to it; and the malignant influence of disobedience on the character and happiness of intelligent beings. Wherever God is concerned, all regard to creatures must be secondary, and comparatively unimportant. But when we consider the number of intelligent creatures;

the dignified nature of their faculties; the importance of their actions in producing happiness or misery; and their capacity of enjoying happiness, or suffering misery, throughout eternity: their combined interests become an object to a created eye literally immense. The interest of one immortal mind, and the virtue of that mind, living and operating throughout endless ages, severally transcend all finite estimation. Of this virtue, and these interests, sin is the absolute destruction. It will, therefore, necessarily seem to the penitent an evil which cannot be measured.

As his own interests and virtue are concerned, he will feel this subject in a peculiar manner. These he naturally realizes in a stronger degree, than he can realize the same things as belonging to others. Particularly, he will be deeply affected by a consciousness of that debasement, which sin has produced in his character. He will feel himself brought low: degraded beneath the proper level of a rational being; lost to all useful and honourable purposes; and active only to such as are unworthy and mischievous. Of course, he regards himself as having been a nuisance to the universe; and therefore justly loathsome in the sight of God, and contemptible in that of all virtuous beings. Of necessity, therefore, he will be odious and contemptible in his own sight.

To atone for an evil of such vast moment, will appear to him utterly beyond his power. It will seem plainly impossible to him to repair, in any manner, the injury which he has done to God; the dishonour, which he has cast upon his law; and the injustice which he has been guilty of to the universe. That this should be done will appear to him indispensable, in order to his acceptance with God. The condescension of God, therefore, in providing, and the benevolence of Christ in accomplishing, such an atonement, will seem to him vast, wonderfully and eminently divine.

2dly. *True repentance involves in it hatred of sin.*

Under the influence of conviction, every sinner hates sin, in this sense; that he regards it as the source of future punishment; that is, he dreads the suffering, and hates the cause of it, as such; and under the influence of this feeling he will usually abstain from many, perhaps most, overt acts of transgression. But the penitent hates sin in its very na-

ture. He does not merely dread the punishment, but the sin independently of the punishment: so that, were there no punishment to follow, he would still carefully avoid the sin. *In its own nature it is loathsome to his taste;* just as certain kinds of food are disgusting to a particular taste; and are avoided, not because they are supposed to be injurious to the health, but merely because they are disgusting.

It ought perhaps here to be observed, to prevent perplexity in the minds of those who hear me, that I do not intend to represent the penitent, *as hating or loathing those kinds of enjoyment* which in their nature may be lawful, and are sinful only by some attendant circumstances with which they are at times enjoyed; nor to represent him *as hating the objects* whence such enjoyment is derived. Objects of this kind, and the enjoyments springing from them, are made agreeable to our nature by the Creator himself; are equally pleasing to the penitent and impenitent; and are in themselves lawful, when existing in the proper degrees, and in the proper circumstances. Food and wine are both means of pleasure, which may be lawfully enjoyed; but they are also the means of gluttony and drunkenness. The penitent hates the gluttony and drunkenness; but he does not, therefore, hate the food and the wine, nor the pleasure which they communicate when lawfully enjoyed. Nor has God required this at his hands. If indeed he has found them to be dangerous to him, as temptations to inordinate and sinful indulgence; he will dread and watch, and, as the case may be, shun them on this account. Yet the pleasure which they communicate when lawfully enjoyed, neither is, nor is required to be, the object of his hatred. *The sin,* committed in an inordinate, or otherwise unlawful, use of the object will be hated by the penitent; and not *the object itself.*

I have mentioned, under the preceding head, that sin will be viewed by the penitent as being primarily evil, because it is an injury done to God. *This consideration will peculiarly awaken his hatred of sin.* An injury, done to a Being so great and glorious, will appear to him pre-eminently unreasonable and ill deserving. He will remember, with peculiar solemnity and lively affection, that this glorious Being has forbidden sin in every form and degree; and

that every transgression is, therefore, an open as well as causeless affront to his infinite authority Nor will he fail to recollect, that the same exalted Being is his own supreme Benefactor; and that every blessing which he has received, has *come down from the Father of lights.* With this great consideration in view, he will be deeply pained by a sense of the ingratitude exercised towards his Creator in every transgression.

Nor will he be less deeply affected, when he remembers, that sin alone occasioned all the sufferings of the Redeemer. That so glorious and excellent a person, as Christ, should suffer at all, and especially in so dreadful a manner, every penitent will feel to be of all things the most undesirable, and the most to be regretted. How evil, then, in its nature, must be the cause of these sufferings; and how distressing to know, that in this evil his own sins have their share!

Besides, all his own sins have been committed in a full view of these sufferings, with an ample knowledge of their greatness and intensity, together with a complete discovery of Christ's excellence in consenting thus to suffer, and amid the very sound of those offers of mercy, which Christ proclaimed through the agonies of the cross. By these considerations the penitent will feel his own unworthiness, particularly his ingratitude, mightily enhanced; and will *abhor himself, repenting in dust and ashes.*

Nor will the mischiefs, occasioned by sin to his fellow-creatures, fail to increase mightily his hatred of this dreadful evil. All the sufferings found throughout this great world, will be easily seen by him to have sprung from this cause only; and a great part of them to be its immediate effects. These, being its proper fruits, exhibit in the clearest and most forcible manner the nature of the tree. In deceit, fraud, contention, cruelty, oppression, and bloodshed, he will see portrayed, in living colours, the detestable nature of the spirit which gives them birth. But this is not all. A much more important consideration will every where present itself to his view, and much more powerfully affect his heart. All his fellow-men are immortal; and are capable of endless happiness or endless suffering. Nay, it will be the actual lot of every one of them to be happy or miserable for ever. Viewed in this light, their interests become infinitely

valuable. Sin, the cause of all their future as well as present misery, is thus invested with an importance, which to the eye of the penitent becomes literally immense. With deep concern and amazement he will behold a vast multitude of rational beings, *bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh*, corrupted by this moral pollution in such a manner, as to render them incapable of happiness; and to such a degree, as to render it wholly improper for God to make them happy. Beyond this, he will see them not only cast off for ever by God, as wholly unfit to be members of the kingdom of happiness, and made objects of his wrath and indignation; but finally ruined, and made for ever wretched, by the proper influence of the sin itself. The same malignant efficacy with which it produces the sufferings of the present world, will produce similar sufferings in every other world where it predominates; greater always in proportion to the degree in which it prevails. In the world of perdition, therefore, being unmingled and perfect, it will produce finished ruin to all its wretched inhabitants. With these views of this mighty evil, he will behold it with the deepest loathing and abhorrence. With these views he will regard that example which may tempt others to sin, those arguments which may perplex or bewilder them, those doctrines which may encourage or quiet them in disobedience, and generally all those motives which may slacken their course in the path of virtue, or quicken their progress in iniquity, only with alarm and horror. Necessarily, therefore, will he refuse to become the instrument of setting these snares for the feet of his fellowmen, and of digging the pit of destruction in their way. Anxiously will he watch, and strive, and pray, that he may not become the means of leading immortal minds to final ruin.

Nor will he fail to be deeply affected with *the evils done by sin to himself*. This part of the subject he will be able to understand more clearly, and to realize more strongly, than perhaps any other. The debasement of his nature, as a rational being, mentioned under the former head, will seem to him an evil of no secondary magnitude. The complete perversion of his noble faculties, the frustration of the end of his existence, the continual inroads made upon his peace, the prevention of his usefulness, together with his

exposure to final perdition, all accomplished by this malignant cause, render it necessarily and supremely detestable in his sight.

At the same time, *this hatred will be directed towards sin of every kind.* The same odious nature is inherent in sins, whatever form they may assume, and in whatever manner they may exist; whether they are secret or open; whether they exist in thought, word, or action; whether they immediately respect God or man, his fellow-men or himself; whether they are reputable or disreputable; whether productive of gain or followed by loss. In every one of these forms they have still the same evil, shameful, odious character; and will therefore universally awaken his hatred.

Finally, *he will hate sin in all persons;* in himself, his family, his friends, his fellow-Christians, his countrymen, and mankind. The only difference here, will be, the nearer it comes home to him, he will hate it the more. In his friends and fellow-Christians, therefore, his family and himself, he will hate it more than in others; especially as the expressions of his hatred towards *their* sins, and his opposition to *his own*, may have a peculiar efficacy in preventing future transgressions. Nor will the kindred or amiableness of any person prevent him from regarding his sins with disgust and abhorrence.

3dly. *True repentance involves in it a sincere sorrow for sin.*

A dutiful child who has disobeyed his father, feels, after all the fears of punishment are over, a sincere regret, because he has disobeyed. A good man, when he has done an injury to a friend, even when the fact is unknown, and himself is secure from all possible detection, laments secretly his unworthy conduct. A penitent feels a similar regret, that he has offended God, and injured his fellow-men; not from the apprehension of their resentment, or of the anger of God merely; but also from the sense of the evil which he has done; from a realizing view of the unworthiness of which he has been guilty. With this view, he will be ever ready to cry out with St. Paul, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

4thly. *True repentance will prompt the subject of it freely to confess his sins before God.*

Confession is the first, the proper, the natural, language of repentance. In this manner Job confessed, when God, appearing to him with divine glory, discovered to him the corruption of his heart and the guiltiness of his life. *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* In the same manner David also confessed: *I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before thee.* Thus also, Nehemiah and his companions, the captives who had returned from Babylon, spent *one fourth part* of the day of their public humiliation in confessing their sins; and said, *Thou art just in all that is brought upon us: for thou hast done right; but we have done wickedly.* Thus the Lamentations of Jeremiah are extensively occupied in this employment. Thus Daniel, in strong terms, declared to God the sins of himself and his people. Thus, finally, have all sincere penitents done in every age, and in every country. The heart in the clear view of its sins, in the strong apprehension of the wrongs which it has done to God and to mankind, is full, and overflows; and *out of its abundance the mouth* is compelled to *speak.* Besides, confession is the first attempt towards making amends for the injury; and the penitent is ready to adopt every measure which may, in his view, contribute to the accomplishment of an end, believed to be so important, and relished as so desirable.

5thly. *True repentance is followed by reformation.*

Every penitent will, like Elihu, pronounce concerning himself, as well as concerning others, *Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement; I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.*

Amendment is the end of all repentance: and this involves the twofold office of *forsaking sin,* and *practising holiness.* It will easily be believed, that he, who hates and mourns for his sins, must, under the influence of this disposition, regard the future commission of them with dread, and proceed to it only under the influence of frailty, the occasional predominance of lust, or the powerful influence of external temptations. To forsake it will also be believed to be a commanding object of his designs and efforts. With this object is intimately connected a fixed and universal deter-

mination faithfully to practise future obedience. This is the sum of the divine pleasure concerning his remaining life; the substance of all the precepts, contained in the law of that glorious being, to have offended whom excites his deepest sorrow, and to please whom is now the object of his most earnest desire. A general reformation of his life will, therefore, be the only conduct originated by the present temper of his heart. Against sin, against all sin, he will *set his face as a flint.* His passions, henceforth, will be subordinated to his conscience; and his conscience enlightened and directed by the Scriptures of truth. Every lust he will labour to subdue, every enemy to overcome, and every temptation to resist or escape. More and more continually will this be the purpose and employment of his life. With increasing resolution he will *go from strength to strength;* improve in holiness as he increases in years; and become, from time to time, more and more *meet to be a partaker with the saints in light,* in their communion and their joys.

REMARKS.

1st. *From these observations we learn, that a repentance may exist, and go far, and yet not be evangelical.*

From the account already given of the repentance experienced by Judas it is plain, that he entertained such views, and felt such emotions, as are also felt by true penitents. There is nothing in the nature of the case, which hinders all these, and others like them, from being experienced by any false penitent. From this fact it is clear, that false repentance may be easily mistaken for the true; and equally clear, that a careful discrimination is indispensably necessary to distinguish them from each other. Otherwise, the false penitent may be easily, and, for aught that appears, fatally deceived. If the account here given of evangelical repentance be admitted, the distinction between this and all counterfeits is clear and decisive. The false penitent never forms just views of the nature of sin; never hates it, as evil done to God and his fellow-creatures; never, in this view, mourns for it; never confesses it ingenuously; and never faithfully forsakes it. He who cannot find these things in his heart and conduct, may safely conclude, that his repentance is not that of the gospel.

2dly. *The same observations prove, that repentance is a spirit justly according with the real state of things.*

The penitent is really, as he pronounces himself to be, a sinner; guilty in the sight of God, and deserving of his wrath. Sin is really the great evil which he feels and acknowledges it to be; and is therefore to be hated, lamented, confessed, and forsaken, in the very manner determined on by himself. His situation is in all respects as bad, and his character as unworthy, as he supposes them. The *views* which he entertains of himself, therefore, are exactly agreeable to truth; and such as he is plainly bound to entertain. All views of himself, and of his condition, which are discordant with these, would be contrary to truth, and a mere mass of falsehood. Of the same nature are the *affections* involved in evangelical repentance. They are the very affections which necessarily arise out of these views; and the only affections which, in the penitent's case, correspond with truth. Of course, they are plain and indispensable parts of his duty.

3dly. *These observations teach us, that repentance is absolutely necessary to salvation.*

Without repentance, the sinner would still continue to be a sinner; an enemy to holiness and to God, to happiness and to heaven. If he did not hate sin; it would be *physically* impossible that he should forsake it; that he should love or practise holiness; that he should be cordially reconciled to God; that he should relish the happiness of heaven; or that he should desire or enjoy the friendship of virtuous beings. It would be impossible, that he should receive Christ as his Saviour; trust in his righteousness for acceptance; love his character; or welcome his mediation. At the same time, it would be *morally* impossible, that God should receive or justify the sinner; unite him to his family; or restore him to his favour. To all these things repentance is plainly and absolutely indispensable.

The views which the penitent entertains of moral subjects, and the affections with which he regards them, prepare him, and are indispensably necessary to prepare him, to partake of the favour of God, the employments of holiness, and the blessings of redemption. Evangelical repentance is the

beginning of moral health in the soul. At the commencement of its existence, the former evil, morbid principles begin to lose their hold, and to have their power diminished. The divine Physician then first achieves his victory over the moral diseases which were before incurable; and the balm of Gilead begins to restore its decayed and ruined faculties. From this moment, immortal health, the life of heaven, returns to the languishing mind; health that cannot decay, life that cannot terminate; the youth of angels, which cannot grow old, but is formed to increase, and bloom, and flourish, for ever.

SERMON LXXVIII.

REGENERATION.

ITS ATTENDANTS. LOVE.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love.—GAL. v. 22.

HAVING considered, in preceding discourses, *faith in Christ* and *repentance unto life*, the *two first* of those moral attributes which I called *the attendants of regeneration:* I shall now go on to examine the nature of *the third* and *fourth* of these attributes; *love to God*, and *love to mankind*. As both these are only exercises of the same disposition, directed towards different objects, I shall here consider them together; reserving a separate discussion of them to a future occasion. St. Paul informs us, that love, viz. the disposition mentioned in the text, *is the fulfilling of the law;* that is, of the two great commands, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.* These commands constitute a primary part of a theological system; and will necessarily become a subject of particular investigation in the progress of these discourses. They will, therefore, furnish an ample opportu-

nity for the separate consideration of these two great exercises of love.

In examining this subject, at the present time, it is my design,

I. *To exhibit the nature of this love;* and,

II. *To prove its existence.*

I. *I shall endeavour to exhibit the nature of evangelical love.*

1st. *The love of the gospel is a delight in happiness:* or, in other words, *good-will towards percipient beings, as capable of happiness.*

Happiness is the object ultimately and alway aimed at by the mind, under the influence of this affection. As percipient beings are the only beings capable of happiness, *the love of happiness is,* of course, *the love of percipient beings.* Of these, *intelligent beings* are capable of so much greater and more important happiness, than *mere animals* as scarcely to allow of any comparison between them. *The love of happiness,* therefore, is supremely *the love of intelligent beings.* This, accordingly, has been assumed as a definition of love. It is not however metaphysically correct. *A righteous,* or virtuous, *man will, as such, regard the life,* and of course the happiness universally, *of his beast;* and this, though a small, cannot fail to be a real, object of his regard.

A delight in happiness, metaphysically considered, supposes it enjoyed, or already in possession. When it is not enjoyed, and yet is supposed to be possible, the same affection becomes, and is styled, *the desire of happiness.* Whatever we delight in, when present and possessed, we desire when absent, or unpossessed. The mind, under the influence of this affection, therefore, while it rejoices in happiness actually enjoyed, necessarily wishes its existence, wherever it is capable of being enjoyed.

2dly. *This love of happiness is universal.*

This proposition follows unavoidably from the former. If the mind delights in happiness, as such, it is plain that this delight will exist wherever the happiness is found. If it desire happiness, as such, this desire will be extended to every case in which it perceives that happiness may be

enjoyed. The delight, therefore, will be coextended with the knowledge which the mind at any given time possesses of actual enjoyment; and the desire, with its knowledge of possible enjoyment. So far then as the views of any mind in which this disposition exists extend, its love to happiness will be universal.

3dly. *This love of happiness is just.*

By this I intend, that the greater happiness, whether actual or possible, will be loved more, and the smaller happiness less. This also is inherent in the very nature of the affection. If the mind delight in happiness, it follows necessarily, that this delight must increase as the object of it increases. For example; if it delight in the happiness of one being, it will equally delight in the same happiness of a second; in the same manner in that of a third; of a fourth; a fifth; a sixth; and so on, in that of any given or supposable number. Or, should we suppose one of these beings to be happy in any given degree; and that happiness doubled, tripled, quadrupled, or increased in any other degree; the delight of such a mind in this object would be increased in the same proportion. I do not here intend, that this affection will operate with the mathematical exactness here stated. I am well aware, that such minds as ours are utterly incapable of operating with their affections in this perfect manner. This mode of illustration has been here used for the sake of exhibiting the general proposition in a manner clear and decisive; and, if I mistake not, it unanswerably evinces the truth of the proposition.

In entire accordance with this doctrine we are commanded *to love God with all the heart*, not only as an object of our *complacency*, but of our *benevolence* also. We are not only required *to approve of his perfect character*, but also *to delight in his perfect happiness*, or, as we more usually term it, *blessedness*. His perfect character is *the cause*, of which his perfect happiness is *the effect*. The former, it is our duty to regard with supreme complacency; the latter, it is equally our duty to regard with supreme benevolence.

No less accordant with this disposition also, is *the second command of the same law. Our neighbour*, that is, any and every individual of the human race, is the subject of the same happiness as ourselves. We are therefore re-

quired to *love our neighbour as ourselves:* viz. because his happiness is of the same importance as our own: not indeed mathematically, but generally and indefinitely; as the words of the command import.

It is to be observed here, that *benevolence is the only object of this command.* The greater part of those who are included here, under the word neighbour, are wholly destitute of virtue, in the evangelical sense. But towards any and all of these it is physically impossible to exercise *complacency:* this affection being no other than the love of such virtue.

4thly. *This affection is disinterested.*

If the preceding positions be allowed, *this* follows of course. Nothing is more evident, than that the mind which loves happiness wherever it is, and in proportion to the degree in which it exists, must of course be disinterested. In other words, it must be without any partiality for its own enjoyment, or any preference of it to that of others. Its delight in the happiness enjoyed by others, will be the same with that which it finds in its own enjoyment; so far as it is able to understand and realize it in the same manner. We cannot, I acknowledge, either understand or feel the concerns of others in the same degree as our own; and from this imperfection would arise, even if our benevolence were perfect, a difference in our estimation of these objects, which, so far as I see, could not be avoided. But in cases not affected by this imperfect state of our minds, cases which even in this world are numerous, no reason can, in my view, be alleged, why the estimation should not be the same. In a more perfect state of being, it is probable the number of such cases may be so enlarged, as to comprehend almost all the interests of intelligent creatures.

5thly. *This love is an active principle.*

By this I intend, that in its nature, it controls all the faculties in such a manner, as to engage them supremely in the promotion of the great object in which it delights. Of this truth we have the most abundant proof in the Scriptural exhibitions of the character of God; of the Redeemer; and of those saints whose history they record. God, saith St. John, *is love. Every good gift,* saith St. James, *and every perfect gift, is from above; and cometh down from the Fa-*

ther of lights. Nevertheless, saith St. Paul, *he left himself not without witness; in that he did good, giving us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. Thou art good,* says David, *and dost good; and thy tender mercies are over all thy works. Jesus Christ,* says St. Peter, *a man who went about doing good.* It is hardly necessary to observe, that the whole body of worthies presented to us in the Scriptures, were in this respect *followers of God as dear children;* or that *the same mind was in them which was also in Christ.* The Epistles of St. Paul particularly, and his whole history after his conversion, as given to us by St. Luke, are one continued proof that this was *his* ruling character. The love which exists *in word and in tongue,* the Scriptures reprobate; and approve and enjoin that only which, in their emphatical language, exists *in deed and truth.* We hardly need, however, look to this or any source for evidence concerning this subject. Love, in all cases, so far as our experience extends, prompts him in whom it exists to promote the happiness of the object beloved. So plain is this to the eye of common sense, that no person believes love to exist in any mind, which does not labour to accomplish happiness for the object which it professes to love. Thus a parent who neglects the happiness of his children, is universally pronounced not to love them; and thus persons, professing friendship for others, and inattentive at the same time to their welfare, are with a single voice declared to be friends in pretence merely. What is true in this respect of these natural affections, is altogether true of evangelical love. Its proper character is to *do good, as it has opportunity.*

6thly. *This principle is the only voluntary cause of happiness.*

The benevolence of intelligent creatures is the same in kind with the benevolence of God; and for this reason is styled *the image of God.* But the benevolence of God is the single original cause, the sole as well as boundless source, of all the happiness found in the creation. In the great design of producing this happiness, he has required intelligent creatures to co-operate with himself. Of their labours to this end, their own benevolence is the only im-

mediate cause. Benevolence therefore, in God and his intelligent creatures, considered as one united principle of action, is the only voluntary source of happiness in the universe. As therefore none but voluntary beings can produce nor even contrive happiness; and as no voluntary beings, except benevolent ones, are active to this end; it is plain that happiness is ultimately derived from benevolence alone; and but for his exertions would never have existed.

7thly. *This principle is one.*

By this I intend, that the same love is exercised by a virtuous mind towards God, towards its fellow-creatures, and towards itself. The affection is one. The difference in its exercises springs only from the difference of its objects. LOVE *is the fulfilling of the law:* that is, one affection exercised towards God and towards man, is alternately the fulfilling both of the first and second commands. He who is the subject of one of these exercises, is of course a subject of the other also. He who loves God, loves mankind; he who loves mankind, loves God. There are not two affections of the mind, in the strict and metaphysical sense; one of which is called love to God, or *piety;* and the other love to mankind, or *benevolence;* but there is one love, now exercised towards God, and now towards mankind.

II. *I shall now proceed to prove the existence of this principle.*

The evidence which I shall adduce for this purpose, will be derived,

1st. *From the Scriptures;* and,

2dly. *From reason.*

The first argument which I shall allege from the Scriptures is the moral law: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart; and thy neighbour as thyself.

I have already observed, that benevolence, or love to happiness, or to intelligent beings as capable of happiness, is the object, and the only object, of the second of these commands. Should any doubt remain on this subject, it may easily be removed by the consideration, that our Saviour has taught us *to consider our enemies, universally, as in-*

cluded under the word neighbour. The enemies of a good man, knowing him to be such, are always wicked men; and, having no holiness or evangelical virtue, cannot, in the *physical sense,* be loved with *complacency,* or *the love of virtue.* The love of happiness therefore, or benevolence, is the principle especially, if not only, enjoined in this law. Accordingly, *our Saviour called the command enjoining brotherly love,* that is, *the love of his disciples towards each other,* or in other words, *complacency, a new commandment.*

As the moral law then enjoins especially the love of happiness; that is, benevolence; so it evidently enjoins this disposition in a proportion corresponding with that which has been insisted on in this discourse. We are required in it *to love God with all the heart; and our neighbour as ourselves.* In other words, we are required to exercise this love proportionally to the importance or greatness of the object loved: supremely towards that object which is supremely great and important; and equally towards those objects whose importance is equal.

With this view of the law perfectly accords our Saviour's practical comment on the second command; *Whatever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.* In this command, our own equitable wishes for good to be done to ourselves, are made the measure of the good which we are bound to do them.

(2dly.) *As another proof I allege* Luke vi. 32, 33. 35. *For if ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. But love ye your enemies; and do good and lend, hoping for nothing again: and your reward shall be great; and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.*

In these declarations of our Saviour, it is manifest, first, that the love which he enjoins is *disinterested love:* for it is productive of beneficence, without reference to a reward. Secondly, we learn from them, that even this is not sufficient to constitute the disinterestedness of the gospel. It is still farther required, that the benevolence shall operate towards enemies; overcoming all hostility towards those who hate us; requiring us, instead of being *enemies,* to become *friends* to our enemies; to render good for their evil;

and blessing for their cursing. Unless we do this, we are elsewhere informed in the gospel, we are not, and cannot be, *the children of our Father who is heaven.* Thirdly, we are taught, that the disposition with which we do good to others, for the sake of gaining good at their hand; or the spirit with which we do good merely to those who do good to us; that is, *selfishness* in its fairest and most reputable form, neither merits, nor will receive, a reward; and is only the spirit of *publicans and sinners.*

(3dly.) *I allege, as another proof, the declaration of the apostle,* 1 Cor. xiii. 5, *Love seeketh not her own.*

In this declaration St. Paul has asserted the disinterestedness of evangelical love, not only in the most explicit manner, but with the force peculiar to himself. Literally he declares, that love does not seek her own interest at all; but is so absorbed in her care for the common good, as to be wholly negligent of her personal concerns. This however I do not suppose to have been the meaning of the apostle. But he plainly intends, that the spirit is wholly destitute of any selfish character. Less than this it will, I think, be impossible to consider as meant by him in this passage.

With these three passages the whole volume of the Scriptures accords: and that these clearly determine the love required in the gospel, to be *the love of happiness, proportioned to the importance of the object loved, and disinterested in its nature;* the points relative to this subject, which are chiefly disputed; cannot, I think, be denied without violence.

To this decisive voice of revelation, reason adds its own unqualified testimony: as I shall endeavour to shew in the following observations.

1st. *The benevolence which I have described, is the only equitable spirit towards God and our fellow-creatures.*

That the interests of God are inestimably more valuable than our own, will not be questioned by any man. This being allowed, it can no more be questioned, that they deserve incomparably more regard than our own. Nor can it any more be doubted, that the interests of our neighbour are, at a fair average, *equally* valuable with our own. The

fact *that they are ours*, certainly adds nothing to their value. For what then, it may be asked, can they be more valuable, than those of our neighbour? God unquestionably regards them alike; and it will not be denied, that he regards them equitably, and in the very manner in which we ought to regard them.

A public or common good therefore, is more valuable and ought to be more highly regarded, than the good of an individual: for this plain reason, that it involves the good of many individuals. This has ever been the only doctrine of common sense. In free countries, particularly, where men have had the power, as well as the right to act according to their own judgment, a majority of votes has always constituted a law: obviously because a majority of interests ought ever to be preferred to those of a minority, and still more to those of an individual. On the same principle, laws which consult the general good, are ever pronounced to be right; although they may operate against the good of individuals. On the same principle only, are individuals required to devote their labour, their property, and at times their lives, for the promotion or security of the general welfare. Selfishness on the contrary, which always prefers private good to public, would, if permitted to operate, produce an entire subversion of public good. All the views, affections, and operations, of selfishness are unjust; the interests of an individual being invariably estimated more highly by this disposition, and loved more intensely, than their comparative value can ever warrant. It can never be a just estimation, which prefers the private good of one to the good of many, the interests of each of whom are just as valuable as those of that one; or which prefers the interests of man to those of God. If this estimation is right, and the regard which accompanies it; then God ought to give up his own kingdom, purposes, and pleasure, for the sake of the least of his intelligent creatures: and the good of the universe ought to be sacrificed to the good of one.

2dly. *It is reasonable to suppose, that God would create, and that he has created, intelligent creatures with this just disposition.*

That there should no where exist in the intelligent kingdom, a disposition regarding things according to their va-

lue, is a supposition too absurd in itself, and too dishonourable to the Creator, to be made by a sober man. Such a disposition, it is plain, must be more estimable and lovely to the eye of the divine mind, than any other which is supposable. If then God made his works with a design to take pleasure in them; or to be glorified by them; he could not fail to give existence to such a disposition; unless it was because he was unable. But this will not be pretended. Such a disposition therefore certainly exists.

3dly. *If there be no such disposition, there can be no pure or lasting happiness.*

For, in the first place, there is no original cause of happiness but the action of minds. Minds are the only active beings in the universe. Matter, if eternal, must have been eternally quiescent. But minds never act to the production of that which they do not love. If then they did not love happiness, they could not act to the production of it. Of course, *if God had not been benevolent,* that is, *if he had not loved happiness; he never could have produced it; nor created those beings who were to be made happy.*

In the second place; *without the same disposition, intelligent creatures could never produce happiness for each other.* Under the divine government, happiness, in an endless variety of forms, is produced by intelligent creatures for each other. The degree in which their benevolent offices accomplish good for each other, is, to a finite eye, literally immense. But it is clearly evident, that if they were not benevolent, no part of this good would exist.

Should it be said, *that creatures who are not benevolent, do in fact produce happiness for each other in the present world; as is unanswerably manifest in the proper influence of natural affection, and various other attributes of the human mind:* I answer, first, that all this happiness, like all other, is ultimately derived from the benevolence of God; and would have had no existence, had he not possessed this disposition. Secondly, the happiness thus produced is far from being pure or lasting. Thirdly, natural affection is not an original and necessary attribute of a rational being; but has its origin and continuance in circumstances which may be deemed accidental; and accordingly has no existence where those circumstances are not found. Fourthly,

natural affection is an attribute of a benevolent as well as of a selfish being; and is therefore no part of selfishness. Fifthly, the Scriptures teach us, that even this good is not derived from the proper tendency of our selfish nature, but from a particular restraining influence of God on its proper operations; which either prevents their existence, or lessens their malignant efficacy. That the world is so comfortable as it actually is, is, I apprehend, the result of a mere act of mercy on the part of God, rather than of the genuine tendency of the human character. Finally, should all be allowed to this source which is claimed for it, the happiness which it yields is so mixed and so transient, as to form an exception to the doctrine which I am defending, too unimportant to deserve any serious attention.

In the third place, *there is no other disposition which is happy.*

The happiness inherent in a disposition, is the enjoyment either experienced in the exercises of the disposition itself; or springing from the consciousness of its excellence; or resulting from a knowledge of the desirable nature of its consequences. Some of the exercises of selfishness are pleasant in themselves, and some in knowledge of their consequences. Thus *pride* is, in a degree, always pleasing to the proud man; pleasing, I mean, in its very nature. The same thing may be said also of the sensual appetites, whenever they are gratified. Some of them also are pleasant in the knowledge of their consequences; particularly those, which respect *fame*, *power*, and *property*. But the pleasure furnished by all of them, is in itself poor, transient, and mixed with no small pain and mortification. The pleasure furnished by our sensual appetites is also a part not of a selfish, but of a merely animal, nature; and, so far as it is temperately enjoyed, belongs equally to a benevolent as to a selfish being. Selfishness can here claim nothing, as being peculiar to itself, except inordinate indulgence; and this is regularly a diminution of the enjoyment, and an accumulation of pain and sorrow. In the mean time, none of the affections of selfishness yield happiness from a consciousness of their nature and operations. They cannot be seen to be excellent, because they are all obviously evil and odious. They cannot be seen to be honourable, because they are

all base and contemptible. Of course, the mind cannot approve of these affections, nor of itself while indulging them; but must condemn both them and itself for cherishing them, as being vile and despicable.

A great part of the happiness enjoyed by intelligent beings, arises from the knowledge, that they are esteemed and loved by other intelligent beings. This is an enjoyment to which selfishness can make no claim; for no being can approve of selfishness. Whether it exists in himself or in others, it necessarily and always awakens contempt. The selfish man is therefore cut off by his very nature from this delightful enjoyment.

At the same time, this spirit produces, of course, evils immense in their number, and surpassing all finite estimation in their degree. Self-condemnation, the hatred and contempt of others, contentions, oppression, tyranny, war, and bloodshed; in a word, all the evil occasioned by man to himself, or to his fellow-men, are uniformly and universally the effects of this disposition. No clearer proof can be reasonably demanded of its unhappy nature and miserable consequences, than the unceasing, bitter complaints with which this world every where resounds; almost all of which terminate in the deplorable nature of this disposition, or its malignant efficacy on the interests of man. It cannot be believed, it cannot with decency be said, that God has formed a universe of intelligent creatures, and withheld from them all that disposition which alone is productive of happiness, and left them wholly to that which is the source of misery alone. That God made the universe with an intention to make it happy, and upon the whole to make it supremely happy, will be denied by gross infidels only. But it is plain, that this end would be impossible, unless he should give to intelligent creatures this disposition.

4thly. *This is the only disposition which can be approved or loved by God.*

It is the only disposition which is like that of God. But all things approve and love that in others, which they approve and love in themselves. God approves and loves himself for his benevolence. Of course, he cannot but approve and love the same disposition in his intelligent crea-

tures; and, by unavoidable consequence, must equally hate that which is of an opposite nature.

It is the only disposition which can voluntarily become the means of his glory. It has been already seen, that benevolence is the only *fulfilment of his law.* It was formerly shewn, and is abundantly evident, that this disposition, and no other, voluntarily coincides with him in promoting the great end of all his works; *viz.* the happiness of his immense kingdom. But it is plain, that this voluntary coincidence of his intelligent creatures he must necessarily approve and love: such approbation and love being, in every such case, inseparable from an intelligent nature. All beings, and God as truly as any other, love, of course, a voluntary coincidence with their favourite designs; and necessarily approve of it also, whenever the designs themselves receive their approbation.

Finally; *it is the only amiable disposition.* There is nothing amiable, beside the voluntary promotion of happiness, and those minds which voluntarily promote it. But benevolence is the only disposition, and the minds in which it exists are the only beings by which happiness is voluntarily promoted. These therefore are not only amiable, but the only things in the universe which are amiable in any serious degree.

But to suppose, that God has not created such beings in the universe as he can approve and love; such beings as voluntarily become the instruments of his glory; such beings as in their nature and efforts shew, incomparably more than all others, his wisdom and goodness, as the Creator of all things; is an absurdity too monstrous to be admitted by a sober man.

I shall only add to the proofs already alleged, that, *the existence of this disposition is unanswerably evinced by facts;* partly disclosed by revelation, and partly obvious to reason.

God, as was shewn in a former discourse, is infinitely benevolent, and wholly disinterested. Christ has also been proved to sustain the same character. That *the same mind was in* the apostles *which was also in Christ*, cannot be disputed; nor can it reasonably be disputed, that it is possessed by every good man, and is that which constitutes the excellence of his character.

REMARKS.

1st. *If these things be true, it is manifest, that evangelical religion is a very different thing from what it has been very frequently supposed.*

Evangelical benevolence is the sum and substance of evangelical religion: that, which entering into faith and repentance, renders them excellent and lovely in the sight of God. It has its seat in the heart only; and not in external conduct nor in the understanding. It is, therefore, totally different from all the external worship and the external actions sometimes termed *moral*, of the superstitious or merely moral man; from the rhapsodies, visions, and pretended revelations, of the enthusiast; and from the speculative faith and enlarged understanding of the mere philosopher.

2dly. *From these observations also it is evident, that the religion of the Bible is as noble, as divine, as could be expected in a revelation from God.*

The disposition required of mankind by the Creator, as the amount of all that which he chooses them to be, must be supposed to accord, in some good measure, with the excellence and dignity of his own nature. If, therefore, in a book professing to be a revelation from him, we should find the contrary character, *viz.* one, which was chiefly useless, and destitute of dignity and worth; demanded, as the sum of human duty; this fact would greatly weaken, nay, it would wholly destroy, its pretensions to be a revelation from God. But if the character required in such a book should be wholly pure, noble, and excellent; should this book be, at the same time, the only one which either disclosed or required such a character; and should every thing contained in it perfectly accord with the requisition; strong presumption would be furnished in this manner, that it was indeed a revelation from God. Such is the character required in the Scriptures.

3dly. *How desirable is that change of heart, to which this disposition in man owes its existence.*

Who, with calm and just consideration of this subject

would not rejoice to be delivered from a narrow-minded, partial, bigoted, envious, proud, avaricious, malignant, temper; and to become the subject of a benevolent, sincere, disinterested, pious, and expansive disposition, inclined to all good, and effectually prepared to love and promote, as well as to enjoy, it? a disposition, the same with that of the *general assembly of the first-born;* the same with that of angels; the same with that of Christ; the same with that of God? all real and enduring good commences within the soul. This disposition is itself that commencement; the beginning of all noble pursuits and dignified enjoyments; the means of ensuring peace and joy, within and without; of securing the love of all virtuous and excellent beings, and of gaining the favour and complacency of God. It fits us to live eternally; eternally to do good to our fellow-creatures; to improve and benefit ourselves; and to glorify our Maker and Redeemer for ever. Eternal life, beauty, and happiness, in itself; it is the source of all other happiness, and peculiarly of the happiness and glory of heaven.

4thly. *How manifest is the wisdom of God in effectuating and requiring this excellent disposition.*

Benevolence is to the intelligent universe what attraction is to the material one: the power which holds the parts together, and unites them in the immense and incomprehensible system. In accomplishing this end, it first forms them of such a character, as renders them capable of this union; a spirit expansive, harmonious, discerning the universal good, and delighting in it with complacency supreme and eternal. Each member of this great kingdom it attaches to each; and all to God. Each it prepares to understand, and to love, his own place, allotments, and enjoyments; and to be equally satisfied with the stations and circumstances of others. These universally he knows are determined by wisdom which cannot err, and by benevolence which cannot injure, in such a manner as most perfectly to accomplish the supreme good of each and of all. This good he prefers to every other: in this he unceasingly rejoices; to the accomplishment of this he consecrates all his powers. Whatever coincides with it he approves;

whatever voluntarily promotes it he loves. To every such being he is bound by this great *bond of perfection*; perfectly binding together all perfect beings.

God, at the head of this amazing kingdom, he sees labouring with infinite power and goodness to accomplish this mighty purpose; and rejoices that these perfections ensure its certain accomplishment. His virtuous creatures also he beholds honourably and delightfully employed, as voluntary agents and instruments, in the same exalted designs. To love and do this is equally *his* glory, and their excellence and beauty. To both, therefore, he is inseparably and eternally united with an attachment which nothing can sunder; nothing weaken; by bands which improve and strengthen for ever.

This divine union includes alike every member of the great system of virtue. In JEHOVAH, it unites him with infinite attachment to his children. In them it unites all, as one vast family, to him with an attachment occupying all the faculties of the soul. He is the sun, they the worlds and systems, which with perfect harmony move around him; attracting and being attracted: enlightened and reflecting light; enjoying and being enjoyed. With a perpetual emanation, his glory informs, pervades, and animates, the whole: while the respective *stars, differing* indeed from each other, are yet all really glorious; and shine with immortal beauty and lustre.

This system of good, selfishness aims and attempts to destroy. The atoms which when joined together formed worlds and systems of usefulness and beauty, it finally separates, by annihilating the attracting influence which held them together. No longer drawn to their great centre, no longer united to each other, they recede continually from God, and light, and good, and from all future connexion with the intelligent universe. The soul ceases from its union to its Maker, and becomes a stranger to its fellow-creatures. Deserting voluntarily all social beings, and by all deserted, it is henceforth alone, separated, and solitary, in the universe; a wanderer beyond the limits of the virtuous creation; moves only to disorder, and operates only to mischief; a dishonour henceforth to its Creator, and a nuisance to his intelligent kingdom.

How infinitely important is it, then, that this glorious principle of love should exist; that it should be effectuated by God; and that it should be required by the solemn authority, the supreme actions, of that law, by which, throughout immensity and eternity, he governs the universe of virtuous beings.

SERMON LXXIX.

REGENERATION.

ITS ATTENDANTS. CONSISTENCY OF BENEVOLENCE WITH PROVIDING PECULIARLY FOR OUR OWN.

But if any provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house; he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.—1 TIM. v. 8.

IN the last discourse, I attempted *to explain the nature, and to prove the existence, of disinterested love.* To this doctrine there have been many *objections;* as there have also been to every other peculiar doctrine of the Scriptures. It is now my design *to consider some of the principal.*

None of these objections is more frequently made, or made with stronger appearances of confidence, than the following: *that if we are required to love others as ourselves, we are,* of course, *required also to do as much for them as for ourselves; to make the same provision for their wants, and to take the same effectual care of their concerns.* "The Scriptures," say the objectors, "inform us, that, *love* existing merely *in word and in tongue,* is not the love which they require, nor at all the object of their approbation; that, as it is productive of no real good to others, it is clearly of no value. The love which they require is, *that which exists in deed and in truth;* which, being the source of solid good, is necessarily the object of rational esteem. If then we are required to love; we are, of course, required to per-

form the actions which flow from love, and which prove its reality and sincerity. If therefore we are required to love in any given degree; we are required also to perform the actions which flow from it in that degree. If we are to love others as ourselves, we are bound to do for them the same things which we are bound to do for ourselves."

I can easily suppose this objection to be made with soberness and conviction. The reasoning by which it is supported has a fair appearance; and cannot be denied to be specious. It deserves therefore a sober consideration, and a rational answer. Such an answer I will endeavour to give; and will attempt to show, that the conclusion, drawn from this reasoning by the objector, is disproved by the very principles on which it is founded; by the very nature of disinterested love, when considered in connexion with the circumstances of the present world. To this end I observe,

I. *That whenever the conduct proposed is physically impossible, it cannot be our duty.*

This assertion will be denied by no man. It can no more be denied, that it excludes from our active beneficence a very great proportion of the human race; *viz.* all, or almost all, those who are remote from us, and a very great proportion of those who are near to us. From doing good to the former we are prevented by distance of place. From doing good to very many of the latter, we are equally prevented by their multitude; the number being so great that we cannot benefit all, unless we give up the duty of being really useful to any.

It ought, however, to be here remarked, that all men can exercise a benevolent spirit towards all men, and can supplicate blessings for all in their prayers. It is also to be observed, that some persons can extend their acts of kindness very far; to distant nations, and to distant ages: particularly those who are eminently qualified to instruct and inform mankind by their writings: and those who regulate the affairs of nations, and thus seriously affect the state of the world. I need not say how few of the human race are included in both these classes.

II. *Whereve" this conduct would frustrate the great end*

of benevolence by lessening human happiness, it cannot be our duty.

It will not be pretended, that the law which requires us to exercise benevolence, or the love of doing good, requires us also to act in such a manner, as to prevent the existence of that good. That this would be necessarily the effect of the conduct proposed by the objector, will be evident from the following considerations:

1st. *If the affairs, interests, and duties, of mankind were all thrown, as according to the objection they must be thrown, into a common stock, there would be little or no good done to any.*

The mass of concerns would be immense; could never be comprehended by the mind of man; and could therefore never be arranged into any order or method. But without such arrangement, there could be no knowledge of what would be necessary, useful, or desirable. Without such knowledge, the interests of men could never be so disposed, as to be pursued with any advantage. Without such knowledge, the duties of men would never be wrought into such a system, as to be understood by him who directed the efforts of others. Much less could they be understood by those who are to make the efforts; or, in other words, to perform the active duties of society.

A small mass of ideas easily becomes too complex an object for the mind distinctly to comprehend, until these ideas are arranged in a regular scheme. Without such arrangement, the human capacity is too limited to think with any clearness or success, wherever the objects of thought are even moderately numerous. But in the case proposed the number of objects in the affairs of a single town would be exceedingly numerous; and would wholly surpass the utmost comprehension of man.

In consequence of our want of capacity to comprehend and methodize these concerns, they would lie in a state of universal disorder and confusion; and all would of course go to ruin. Instead of the good which is now contrived and done, there would be comparatively nothing done or contrived. Instead of the abundant food and raiment, instead of the comfortable habitations, the extensive instructions, and the multiplied kind offices, now furnished by mankind

to themselves, and each other; none of these things would be supplied; nor any thing else which is useful; nor, indeed, any thing else which is necessary. Mankind, on the contrary, would be houseless, hungry, and naked; and in endless multitudes would perish with famine, heat, and frost.

Besides, every kind of human business is imperfectly done, and to little purpose, when it is done in the gross; compared with what is accomplished when it is separated into parts, and these are severally distributed to different hands. In this case, the whole business is rendered simple, easy to be understood, and easy to be accomplished. In this manner every thing is done much more expeditiously, and more perfectly. Much more is, therefore, done; and that which is done, being better done, will answer a much better purpose. Such has been the regular progress of things in all civilized nations; and it has ever borne an exact proportion to the degree of their improvement. The business of life has thus been actually and sedulously divided, wherever considerable designs have been skilfully carried on. In this manner, the effects of human industry (or the business actually done) have been increased beyond what the most sanguine mind could imagine. One man, for example, to whom the whole business of making so simple a thing as a *pin* was allotted, could hardly finish twenty in a day: ten men, dividing the several parts of the business among them, can easily finish more than forty-eight thousand. What is true of this subject is true, in different degrees, of all human business; and extends to the ship, the manufactory, and the farm, with an influence generally the same.

2dly. *It is indispensable to the accomplishment of human concerns, that the division of human industry should be voluntary.*

Force and *pleasure* are the only causes by which men have been induced to labour. Under a free government, force cannot be applied to this end; nor, except very imperfectly, under a despotic one. Even where it is thus applied, it is so far unavailing as to reduce the quantity and value of that which is done by slaves, or men compelled to labour, to one half, one third, or one fourth, of that

which is voluntarily done by the same number of freemen. A single family, at the head of one hundred slaves, will easily consume all that is produced by the labour of those slaves; while that of an equal number of freemen would amply support five-and-twenty families. From these observations it is plain, that if the voluntary industry now exerted, were to cease, and forced labour to be substituted for it, one half, two thirds, or three fourths of human enjoyments, now furnished by voluntary industry, would at once be lost by mankind

Industry becomes voluntary, *only by the agreeableness of the employment chosen; or on account of the reward which it secures; or, what is more commonly the fact, by both. The nature of the employment* is often so important in this respect, that no reward can ever reconcile many persons to the employments in which they are placed by their parents, or induce them to acquire the skill which is necessary to success. Were we generally forced to our employments we should find this generally the fact; and the whip would be almost as necessary to compel *our* industry, as it ever has been to compel that of slaves. Were it possible to manage a world in this manner, the result would still be the general diffusion of poverty, suffering, and depopulation. On the contrary, plenty, ease, and comfort, nay, convenience, and even luxury, are the regular result of voluntary industry, in all countries enjoying the common blessings of Providence.

3dly. *In this very manner God has divided the business of mankind, by separating them into families.*

By the separation of mankind into families God has distributed their business in such a manner, that a little part is placed in every hand, which is capable of managing business at all; such a part, and such only, as each can easily comprehend, and easily accomplish. Human business is therefore so divided, here, that it can be done; and done with ease, expedition, and success.

At the same time, the division is perfectly voluntary: the employment, in every case, being ordinarily chosen by the individual for himself. The situation also in which he is placed, and the partner with whom he is connected in life, are both objects of his choice; and these facts, united

with the common rewards of industry, furnish all the reasons, which can usually exist, to render it cheerful and efficacious.

This division is the best possible, because it is the simplest and the easiest possible; the result of mere nature; requiring the intervention of no force, law, or human contrivance: because it extends throughout the world, over every age and nation, in the same easy and perfect manner; because it exists every where, through mere propensity; without any contention, and without any difficulty. It is the best, because it has been thoroughly tried; and has been always found peacefully and happily to accomplish the end in view. No attack has been able to change its course; no circumstances to check its progress. It is the best, because it is the establishment of God himself: the result of his perfect wisdom and goodness; and an honourable proof of these attributes in its Author. In perfect accordance with these observations it has ever proved the means of producing necessaries to the whole race of Adam; comfort and convenience to most; and, to not a small number, wealth, luxury, and splendour.

4thly. *The division of the world into families is of immense utility to mankind, as it generates natural affection.*

Natural affection is solely the result of natural relations; and almost all these are originated by the family state. With every other distribution of mankind which can be substituted for this they are wholly incompatible.

The importance of natural affection to the human race is incalculable. It resists, in a great degree, the tendency of mere and absolute selfishness; expands and softens the heart; excites and nourishes sympathy and compassion; and prevents the world from becoming a mere seat of clashing, violence, and cruelty. The attachment which natural affection forms in men towards the members of their families, ultimately extends itself also to their habitations and farms; and by an easy process reaches their country, laws, government, and nation. All men without it would in the end become mere vagabonds and outcasts, thieves and robbers.

To prevent these evils, it would seem, God implanted in us this singular propensity of our nature; a propensity

highly useful, when we are virtuous; and indispensable to our peace and comfort while we are sinful. In the absence of virtue, it is the only tie which effectually binds mankind together.

5thly. *By the institution of families preparation is effectually made for the preservation, support and education, of children.*

The truth of this proposition, and the manner in which it is accomplished, will naturally be the themes of a future discourse, in which I propose more extensively to handle this subject. Suffice it now to say, that but for this institution children would neither be loved, nor preserved, nor educated. *The substance of all education is the establishment of good habits.* Habits extend alike to the body and mind; and equally influence our thoughts and affections, our language and conduct. Without them, nothing in the human character or human life is efficacious, permanent, or useful. To establish them therefore in the morning of life, is the great business of all wise and well-directed education. But habits are formed only by the frequent and long-continued repetition of the same measures; and nothing ever becomes habitual, except that which has been long and often repeated. To accomplish such repetition, nothing will suffice but the steady affection of married parents; that is, so far as useful and moral purposes are concerned. Of course, but for this institution, children would never be habitually trained to industry, to economy, to submission, or to good order; nor to sweetness of disposition, tenderness of affection, amiableness of manners, offices of kindness, or any other useful conduct. Of course, when they were not left to perish, they would grow up without knowledge, useful principles, or useful habits; without the knowledge or love of good order; without amiableness; and without worth. Of course, they would become mere beasts of prey. Not only would civilized life, with all its arts and improvements, with all the blessings of rational freedom and good government, with all the superior blessings of morality and religion, vanish from under heaven; but new horrors would be added to the society of savages. The world would become one vast den; and all its inhabitants would be changed into wolves and tigers.

6thly. *Were the affairs of mankind thrown together in a common stock, according to the scheme of the objector; as all would know, that every man was entitled alike to the fruit of the labours of all, none would labour, except for the present moment.*

Neither inclination nor duty will ever prompt any man to labour for another, who, while equally able, will not labour for himself. That inclination will not produce this effect, I need not attempt to prove: that duty will not, is alike the decision of the Scriptures and common sense. *He that will not work, neither let him eat,* is equally the judicial sentence of both.

In the *present* state of man, amid all the advantages furnished to industry by education, habit, example, and reward, the number of idlers is not small. In the *proposed* state, it would include the whole number of the human race. There would therefore be, originally, no disposition to labour. Should we, however, suppose some tendencies of this nature to exist; a complete discouragement would be thrown on all, by the knowledge, that the proper reward of every industrious effort would either be wholly prevented, or snatched away by the hands of those who would not labour at all. Of course, mere necessaries; such as food, and clothes, and habitations, and fuel; would be provided only in the degree which absolute necessity demanded, even by those who were industriously inclined. What then would become of the rest? Plainly, where they did not plunder, they would perish.

As therefore *necessaries only* would be provided, and even these only in the most stinted manner; it is evident, that all the *comforts* of men would vanish at once. All the blessings of civilized life; its knowledge, arts, refinement, and religion; would cease to exist. There would be neither schools nor churches: for none would be inclined nor able to build them. There would be neither instructors nor ministers; neither legislators nor magistrates. Law, protection, and justice, learning and religion, together with a host of blessings, which they lead in their train, would visit the world no more.

7thly. *All the duties of man respect especially the objects which he best knows; those particularly which are*

most, and most commonly, within his reach; and to which he can most frequently and effectually extend his beneficence.

Man owes more to the poor in his neighbourhood; to his neighbours generally; to the town and the country in which he lives; than to others. The reason is obvious. It is in his power to do them more good; and God has placed him where he is, that he may do this very good. For the same reason he owes more to his own family; because he can do more good to the members of it, than to any other equal collection of mankind.

As therefore it is the indispensable duty of all men to do the most good in their power; and as this is the direct dictate, the genuine tendency, of benevolence; so it is certain, that the division of mankind into families furnishes the fairest, and the only fair, foundation, for accomplishing this purpose in a successful manner. On any other supposable plan, instead of increasing the efficacy of benevolence, or multiplying the enjoyments of mankind, we should, in a great measure, cramp the former and destroy the latter.

REMARKS.

1st. *From these observations it is evident, that no objection lies, from the nature of benevolence, against this great requisition of the gospel.*

From the considerations which have been alleged, it is manifest, that the arrangement of mankind into families is the foundation of more possible and more actual good than could be accomplished by any other means; of more, if man were perfectly disinterested, and yet possessed of his present limited capacity; of incalculably more, as man really is—a selfish, fallen creature. At the same time, infinitely more evil is prevented. The gospel therefore has directed the efforts of human benevolence in the best manner; and so, that they may be truly said to be employed with the highest advantage.

At the same time, the wisdom of God is strongly manifested in furnishing every individual of the human race with so desirable a field for the exercise of his benevolence. In each case, this field is at his door; always within his reach; easily comprehended; necessarily delightful; ever

inviting, and ever rewarding his labours. At the same time it is sufficiently wide to employ and exhaust all his contrivance, and all his active powers. No where else could he do so much good; and the utmost which he can do can be done here. This field is also provided for *every man*. Objects of beneficence are furnished to him, of course; and for all those objects an efficient benefactor is supplied. Thus, in the simplest of all modes, is provision effectually made for the beneficence of all, and the comfort of all.

At the same time, this happy arrangement becomes, of course, the foundation of the happiest distribution of mankind into larger societies; and the means of uniting to them, in the strongest and most enduring manner, the attachment of the individuals. He therefore, whose superior powers and opportunities enable him to extend the offices of good-will beyond this little field, has one which is wider, always spread around him; where these superior powers may always be advantageously employed. *This more extended scene of usefulness is a mere appendage to the other.* Were there no families, there would be no country; were there no *little* spheres of beneficence, there would be no *great one;* and were good-will not exercised first towards those who are near, it would never be extended to those who are distant. The kindness learned by the fireside, and practised towards the domestic circle, is easily spread by him, who is invested with sufficient talents, through a country, or extended over a world.

2dly. *These observations clearly shew the folly of Godwin's system of human perfectibility.*

This wretched apostle of atheism, with a weakness exceeded only by his audacity, has undertaken, in form, to shew himself wiser than his Maker. For this purpose, he has boldly declared marriage to be an unjust monopoly; and the institution of families to be the means of preventing the happiness and perfection of man. Of this perfection a promiscuous concubinage, and a community of labours and of property, are, in his opinion, essential constituents. Nor has the whole concurring experience of mankind, invariably opposed to his doctrines, been sufficient to awaken him from his dreaming speculations to sober thought, and

the exercise of common sense. This system, if it may be called such; this crude gathering together of ideas into a mob; he professedly founds on the doctrine of disinterested good-will: and *these* he professes to be the genuine consequences of this glorious principle. Were they indeed its consequences, every good man would be struck with amazement and horror: for they would undoubtedly annihilate all the comfort, peace, and hopes, of mankind. That benevolence, which is the only virtue, would prove the most fruitful and efficacious cause of absolute destruction to all human good: and its glorious character, instead of being the voluntary cause of happiness, would be exchanged for that, of being only and fatally the voluntary cause of misery.

Who for example would labour, if he were uncertain that he should enjoy the fruit of his efforts: much more, if he were assured that he should not enjoy it? What multitudes now refuse to labour, when completely secure of all its products? Were this stimulus to industry taken away, the exertions of man would terminate in a moment; and the world would become the seat of universal inexertion and idleness. The food, clothes, and other comforts, now brought into existence by the toil of man, are barely sufficient to supply his immediate wants. All the food annually produced, is annually consumed. Multitudes are scantily supplied: while always some, and in particular seasons great numbers, even in industrious and fruitful countries, perish with hunger. Suppose half the labour by which food is furnished were to cease, what would be the consequence? The answer cannot be mistaken. Multitudes must immediately die; and still greater multitudes perish by gradual suffering, and lingering want. The young, particularly the infirm, the feebler sex, together with all those unaccustomed to labour at all, or unacquainted with that kind of labour by which food is produced, must, where they did not subsist by plundering others, become speedily victims to famine. Within the period of a single generation, the present population of the globe would be reduced to that of an American wilderness. China, India, and Europe, would be emptied at once. The arts of life, the knowledge, the order, the safety, the refinement, the humanity, the mo-

rals, and the religion, of civilized society would vanish; and hunting, and scouting, and pawawing, be substituted in their stead. The regions which are now beautified with verdant fields, and enriched with luxuriant harvests; whose hills and plains are adorned with cheerful villages, and splendid cities: in which thousands of churches invite mankind to the worship of God; and ten thousands of schools allure their children to knowledge and improvement; would become a vast Patagonian desert, gloomily set with here and there a solitary weekwam; wandered over at times by the prowling foot of a savage; and, when undisturbed by the warwhoop, the shrieks of terror, or the groans of suffering, hushed into the universal sleep of silence and death. That such would be the fact is certain, because where property has for a length of time continued unsafe, it has all regularly existed.

One half of the story, however dismal the recital may seem, has not yet been told. The very savages have families; and provide for them with no little care. We must sink below the *Patagonian who performs this duty*, to find either the character or the circumstances of those *who do not*. The savages, in many instances at least, are chaste; in all, are the subjects of natural affection, and feel strong attachments to their friends and their nation. These means of comfort, these last hopes of virtue, the philosopher whom I have mentioned proposes to destroy. In their stead he leaves nothing but the fierce and brutal passions of men, sanctioned by the voice of philosophy, and legalized by the decrees of legislation. These passions and appetites, wholly unrestrained, because thus legalized and sanctioned, would originate, direct, and control, all the future conduct of men. What these passions would dictate we know, from what they have always dictated. What they would accomplish we know, from what, when let loose, they have heretofore accomplished. If any man is at a loss on this subject; he may find a faint image of what he seeks in a den of thieves, or a horde of banditti. To complete the picture, let him cast his eye onward to a lair of wild beasts, and a sty of swine. With all these objects in view, he would find a faint image of the degraded, ferocious, guilty, suffering state of this miserable world, accomplished by these Godwinian means of perfection. Virtue itself, therefore

according to the scheme of this writer, would become the cause of exterminating all virtue from the breast of man; as well as of rooting all enjoyment out of the present world.

3dly, *We have here a specimen of the success with which human philosophy directs the moral concerns of mankind.*

The Scriptures have required us to *love our neighbour as ourselves;* and have directed *the application* of this principle in such a manner as to give it its utmost efficacy, and to produce, by means of it, the greatest mass of human good. "God," says Dryden, "never made his work for man to mend." A philosopher, laying hold on this principle, and understanding it only in the gross, has undertaken to direct its application anew; and in a manner better suited to his own feelings. The consequence, as we have seen, is, the gold is changed into dross in a moment; the food into poison. That which, as the Scriptures taught and directed it; nay, that which left to itself, to its own inherent tendencies; would produce nothing but happiness; would, as taught by this infidel philosopher, destroy all the good of man. The benevolence of the Scriptures would make heaven: that of Godwin would produce a hell. Such are the effects of human philosophy, when resisting the ordinance of God, and forgetting, that *the foolishness of God is wiser than men,* she boldly interferes with the system of his truth and providence. The scene before her *is as the garden of Eden;* filled with life, beauty, and happiness; brilliant and glorious as is the heaven-devised landscape; and fraught, as Paradise, with *every thing good for food,* or *pleasant to the eye.* She is still unsatisfied with her allotted condition, and with the scheme of her destined enjoyment. Not desirous of becoming, but conscious of having already become, *as gods, knowing good and evil,* she puts forth her presumptuous hand; and, resolved to add to her stock of blessings such as she knows to be prohibited, seizes in an evil hour the forbidden good. How wonderful, how distressing, the change! In a moment the fascinating scene has vanished; and Paradise, with all its beauty, happiness, and splendour, has fled for ever. Where bloomed the tree of life, and flowed the waters of immortality, nothing remains but a world *of thorns and briers,* an immeasurable waste of sorrow and death.

SERMON LXXX.

REGENERATION.

ITS ATTENDANTS. CONSISTENCY OF BENEVOLENCE WITH SEEKING SALVATION.

Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life.—ROM. II. 6, 7.

IN the last discourse, I considered *one favourite objection* against the doctrine of disinterested love: viz. *If we are required to love others as ourselves, we ought to do as much for them as for ourselves:* particularly, *we ought to make the same provision for them, and their families, which we are bound to make for ourselves and our families.*

This objection, I endeavoured to shew, is so far from being grounded in truth, or from being a general consequence from the doctrine of disinterested love, that as the world is constituted, love dictates the contrary conduct. Disinterested love prompts those who possess it, to produce the greatest mass of happiness in their power. But the scheme proposed, instead of producing more happiness, would destroy that which now exists, and subvert whatever is desirable in the present state of things.

In this discourse, I propose to consider another plausible objection against this doctrine, viz. *that we are commanded to seek eternal life, as the proper reward of our faith and obedience; and that this reward is promised to those, who believe and obey, by God himself. This command, and this promise,* it is alleged, *being given by God himself, cannot be denied to be right. That we ought therefore to seek for everlasting life, must of course be admitted. But this,* it is asserted, *is aiming at a reward; is a conduct, springing from self-love; and is not disinterested. It follows then,* say

the objectors, *either that disinterested love is not required in the Scriptures; or that the requisitions of the Scriptures are inconsistent with each other.* This objection, it will be observed, lies in *the conclusion only.* The premises are just and true. If the conclusion follows, I will give up the doctrine.

Lord Shaftesbury formerly advanced with great labour and parade a similar doctrine; but for a very different purpose. *He* maintained, that disinterestedness is virtue, and the only virtue. At the same time, he denied, that it could consist with any hope of reward, or any fear of punishment. *These,* he declared, *made virtue mercenary, mean, and selfish. True virtue,* according to his scheme, *consists wholly in doing good for the sake of that good: for the pleasure, found in the good done, considered by itself, and wholly unconnected with any consequences; without any regard to advantages arising from it, or to disadvantages springing from the contrary conduct.*

This celebrated writer, it is true, teaches elsewhere the opposite doctrine; and asserts, that *all the obligation to be virtuous arises from its advantages, and from the disadvantages attendant upon vice; and that such advantages are a great security and support to virtue.* These, and other things of the like nature, he declares with no less confidence than the former opinions. It would be easy, therefore, to refute him by his own declarations. But this, though it might answer the purposes of mere controversy, would not satisfy a Christian audience. Were infidels required to be consistent with themselves, they never would appear in the field of debate.

The conclusion which lord Shaftesbury drew from his principles was, that *the Scriptures, so far as they have influence, annihilate, by threatenings and promises, all virtue.* Hence he inferred, and, as it would seem, in his own view irresistibly, *that the Scriptures cannot be the word of God.* Both these views of this interesting subject are, I apprehend, radically erroneous, and founded in false and imperfect conceptions of disinterested love.

In the text it is declared, that *to those who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will render,* as a reward, *eternal life.* To

seek for glory, honour, and immortality, therefore, is in a high degree pleasing to God; and must of course be truly and eminently virtuous conduct. If this conduct consists with disinterestedness, and arises from it; it must be acknowledged on the one hand, that disinterestedness is not impeached by the objection already recited; and on the other, that the Scriptures, while they require and encourage us to seek eternal life, do not render virtue mercenary; nor destroy, nor in any degree lessen, either virtue itself, or the obligations to virtue.

Before I enter upon the direct proof of this doctrine, it ought to be remarked, that the scheme of lord Shaftesbury confutes itself. His favourite doctrine is, that virtue consists wholly in doing good for its own sake, without any regard to any advantage which may follow from it; or to any disadvantage which may arise from a contrary conduct; such regard being, in his view, a destruction of virtue. Now let me ask, What is the difference between doing good for the sake of *the pleasure attending it*, and doing good for the sake of *the pleasure following it?* According to lord Shaftesbury, virtue consists in doing good for the sake of the pleasure which it furnishes. Suppose then *the virtuous action to be done now, and the pleasure* furnished by it, *to be enjoyed an hour hence, or to-morrow*; would it be in any sense more mercenary to do the action, for the sake of enjoying this pleasure an hour hence, or to-morrow, supposing the pleasure to be the same, than for the sake of enjoying it at the time, when the action is done? The pleasure, according to the supposition, *is the same in kind and degree.* Can it then be any more or less virtuous, to be thus influenced by a pleasure which will exist an hour hence, or to-morrow, than by the same pleasure existing at the present moment?

The truth, in this case, undoubtedly is, that it is neither more nor less virtuous, to be influenced in the same manner and degree, by the same kind and degree of pleasure found in the same object, whether the pleasure is to be experienced at one time or at another. The *nature of the pleasure which is enjoyed*, and *the nature of the object whence it is derived*, render the action in which that pleasure is sought, either virtuous or not virtuous. If we take

pleasure in happiness wherever it is enjoyed, and in promoting it wherever this is in our power; if at the same time this pleasure is proportioned to the happiness enjoyed or promoted; we are of course the subjects of virtue; and *that*, just so far, as the pleasure is experienced. The time, at which it is experienced, is here evidently of no consequence; and cannot, even remotely, affect the subject. If, then, it is mercenary, mean, and selfish, to be influenced by this pleasure, expected at a future time; it is equally selfish, mean, and mercenary, to be influenced by the same pleasure, expected at the time when the action is performed.

That the pursuit of eternal life is wholly consistent with the nature of disinterested love, I shall now attempt to shew by the following considerations:

1st. *Our happiness is a desirable object; and deserves to be sought in a certain degree.*

Our happiness is, in this respect, exactly of the same nature with that of others; is as truly desirable, and as really deserves to be promoted, as that of any created beings whatever. In whatever degree it exists, it ought to be delighted in; in whatever degree it is capable of existing, it ought to be desired. As the fact, *that it is our happiness*, renders it no more valuable than that of others; so, plainly, it does not render it at all less valuable It claims, therefore, to be promoted on the same grounds, as any other happiness of the same value. As it is intrusted to our own peculiar care; it demands more from us, as that of others does from them. For ourselves we can no more than we can for others; and this of course is our duty.

2dly. *Neither our present nor future happiness is necessarily inconsistent with that of others.*

All the good which God has made it lawful for us to enjoy *in this world*, is consistent with the good of others. Whenever it is promoted, therefore, there is a direct increase of the general happiness. To produce this effect is the great duty and dictate of benevolence; and must of course be right.

Our eternal good cannot fail to be consistent with the good of the universe. *God has no pleasure in the death of*

the sinner; but would rather that he would repent and live. Accordingly *he hath commanded all men every where to repent.* What he has thus commanded cannot but be right in itself. Accordingly he hath directed, that *our prayers and supplications should be made for all men.*

What the Scriptures thus teach, reason wholly approves. We are all made capable of happiness. This capacity was not given in vain; but was intended to be supplied. Every man, who thinks soberly at all, feels, and acknowledges, accordingly, that he is bound to promote, as much as in him lies, the happiness of every other man, both present and future: and no man would fail to be self-condemned, if he were to indulge a wish, or even a willingness, that any one of his fellow-creatures should be miserable hereafter. Nay, indifference to this subject would not fail of being followed by severe reproaches of conscience. But what it is the duty of all men thus to wish, and to seek; what no man can oppose, or regard with indifference, without guilt; it is peculiarly his duty to wish, and seek for himself; both because the accomplishment of this work is committed to him by his Maker, and because this work can be done by him more effectually than by any other.

3dly. *We are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves; that is, generally and indefinitely as well as ourselves; and of course are at least equally required to love ourselves as we love our neighbour.*

The rectitude of this law cannot be questioned, even by lord Shaftesbury; nor can he, or any other man, deny, that it exhibits to us disinterested love in the fairest form, and the strongest manner. But, as has been already shewn, we are bound, by the dictates both of reason and revelation, to seek the future and eternal good of our neighbour; to desire it, and to promote it, as far as is in our power. By this very command then, the law, originally enjoining benevolence as the great duty of intelligent beings; a law, to which reason unconditionally subscribes; we are absolutely obliged to seek our own eternal life.

4thly. *Our eternal life is in itself an immense good.*

The endless happiness of a rational being is of more value,

than can be conceived by any finite mind Within a moderate period, it will amount to more than all the happiness which in this world has been enjoyed, or will ever be enjoyed here, by all its inhabitants. Whatever is endless admits of no definite comparison with that which is not. But the happiness of a future state is not endless merely; it is also endlessly increasing; and will soon rise in degree, as well as duration, above the highest human comprehension. Such, of course, is the addition made to the common good of the universe, whenever the eternal life of an individual is secured. To neglect the pursuit of such happiness as this, is madness: to oppose it is malignity, which no words can describe.

5thly. *Eternal happiness consists in eternal disinterestedness, and its consequences.*

The happiness of heaven arises from the disinterested love of God, communicated in various blessings to his children; in their disinterested communications of good to each other; and in the enjoyment derived by their minds from the exercises of virtue. It is acknowledged, on all hands, that it is desirable to live virtuously *here*. All the reasons which operate in this case, render it at least equally desirable to live virtuously *hereafter*, throughout any and every period of duration in which such a life may be enjoyed. It is by all men acknowledged, that it is useful to do good *here*, and *at the present time*. He who makes this acknowledgment, cannot without gross self-contradiction deny, that it is equally useful to do good, *wherever it may be done*, and *at every future period*. If then it is proper, if it is virtuous, to desire and to seek to live a virtuous life, or to do good in the present world; it is equally virtuous, and equally proper, to desire and seek to do the same things in a future state of being. All the labours, then, by which we may possess ourselves of such a life in the present world, must, with equal propriety, be directed to the attainment of such a life in the world to come.

But it is not only *desirable* and *proper*, that we should do this in the present world; it is *a plain, high, and indispensable duty*; and, in a sense, *the sum of all our duty*; so far as this world is concerned. It cannot but be perceived, that

it is, in the same sense, the sum of all our duty, with respect to the future world.

This, however, is far from being the amount of the whole truth concerning this subject. As much as eternity exceeds time; as much as perfect virtue excels the present frail character of good men here as much as endless virtue, as much as endlessly increasing virtue, outruns in its importance the transient virtue of this momentary life; so much more is it our duty to seek the good of a future life, than that of the present. Indeed, man lives here, only to become prepared to live hereafter. Our whole duty therefore ought, during the present life, to be performed with a supreme reference to that which is to come.

Thus the pursuit of eternal good is so far from being opposed to disinterestedness, from being mercenary, mean, and selfish; so far from destroying the nature of virtue, or lessening its obligations; that it is its genuine dictate; its spontaneous tendency; its most exalted aim. No virtuous mind, if properly informed, can fail of pursuing this object; and no object, which respects ultimately the present world, can call forth virtuous exercises of so elevated and excellent a nature.

6thly. *By our eternal life the happiness of all virtuous beings is greatly increased.*

There is joy in heaven, saith our Saviour, *over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance.* Whatever else may be the meaning of Christ in this passage, it is unquestionable, that the inhabitants of heaven experience a real joy in the repentance of a sinner. Reason, as well as revelation, clearly teaches us, that virtuous beings cannot fail to find enjoyment in this subject, because repentance is an exercise of virtue, and the means of securing happiness. In the future virtue and future happiness of such a sinner, the same beings will, at all times, find similar enjoyment; increasing continually in degree, as these objects of it increase. As these will, at the commencement of a future existence, be perfect; and will rise higher and higher in the same perfection for ever; so it is plain, the enjoyment found in them will increase throughout every succeeding period. Thus,

every inhabitant of this world who secures his own eternal life, becomes an everlasting and perpetually increasing benefit to the virtuous universe; a blessing which no words can describe, and whose value no numbers can reckon. Can it be necessary to ask, whether it is virtuous to aim at this character?

7thly. *God is glorified, whenever we seek and obtain eternal life.*

When Christ was born, a multitude of the heavenly host sung, *Glory to God in the highest,* because there was *peace on earth, and good-will towards men.* But if none of the human race should experience this good-will; that is, if none of them should obtain eternal life; the glory, otherwise springing from this source, would be prevented. To this glory of God every person, then, who secures eternal life, contributes by accomplishing, in one instance, that out of which the glory arises. The glory of God, in this case, is *a whole* made up of the individual instances in which he is glorified. If, therefore, no individual sought his salvation, none would obtain it; and, if none obtained it, the work would not be done; and the glory of God, in this important particular, would not be accomplished. How important it is, may, in some measure, be discerned from these facts; that God sent his own Son to die, that we we might live; and his Spirit, to renew us, that we might become heirs of life.

Thus have I endeavoured to shew, that the pursuit of eternal life is so far from being opposed to the nature of disinterested love, that it is one of its primary dictates; a conduct invariably springing from its influence; and that the Scriptures, instead of lessening or destroying virtue, by requiring this conduct of us, have increased the obligations to it, and directed it to its proper end.

Those who make the objections contended against in this discourse, have, in my view, always failed of distinguishing between *disinterestedness* and *uninterestedness.* The distinction between them is however perfectly clear and incalculably important. To be *disinterested* is to be *without a selfish interest* in any given thing or things; to be *uninterested* is to have *no interest* in them at all. *A disinterested*

man may take the deepest interest in any subject; and, *the deeper the interest, the more disinterested he may be. The uninterested man can have no interest in that subject, either selfish or benevolent.* To be absolutely disinterested is to be absolutely free from selfishness. To be absolutely uninterested is to be absolutely without any interest or concern in any thing. A perfectly disinterested man would experience a supreme delight in the perfect happiness of the universe. A perfectly uninterested man, if we can suppose such a one to exist, would feel no concern in any happiness whatever. The reason why these terms have been supposed to denote the same thing, may have been, that *the word* INTERESTED *is frequently opposed to each of them.* This word originally denotes *the concern which we feel in any thing:* but has long been figuratively and very commonly used to denote *a selfish concern;* probably, because the interest which the human heart feels in most things, is so generally a selfish interest.

It is not my design to contend that *there is not a real and great pleasure found in the exercises of virtue;* nor that *the virtuous man does not always experience this pleasure in such exercises;* and *that, in exact proportion to his virtue;* nor that *this is not a proper motive to engage him to these exercises.*

The true nature of virtue is well described in this definition: *the love of doing good; or the love of promoting happiness.* In all the good, therefore, which is done by ourselves or others, and, of course, in all that is enjoyed by ourselves or others, whenever it is not inconsistent with some greater good, virtue delights of course. In its own proper nature, it aims at such good; and for such it labours, whoever is to be the recipient. Its true excellence lies in this; that *it is the voluntary and only source of happiness in the universe.* In aiming at our own happiness there is no *necessary* selfishness. Selfishness consists in a preference of ourselves to others, and to all others; to the universe, and to God. This is sin; and all that in the Scriptures is meant by sin. In every individual sin, this will invariably be found to be the essential and guilty character. Thus sensuality is the desire of self-gratification, at the expense of any and all other happiness. Thus ambition is the desire of aggrandizing, and avarice the desire of enriching,

ourselves, in preference to the interests of all others. From this spirit arises all our opposition to God, and all our injustice to his creatures. He, who has seriously and entirely preferred God to himself, or the good of the universe to his own private, separate good, has, in the complete sense, become virtuous.

God wills our happiness. It is therefore right, it is virtuous, in us to seek and to promote it both here and hereafter. In this conduct there is no selfishness. We do, indeed, commonly pursue it, in preference to that of all others. Such a pursuit of it is sinful; and the spirit with which we pursue it is, by turns, every sinful passion and appetite, and the source of every evil purpose and effort towards God and our fellow-creatures. Our pride, impiety rebellion, and ingratitude; our self-dependance, our impatience, and murmuring, under the government of God; are all only different forms of this disposition. The parsimony, fraud, and oppression, of the miser; the envy, intrigues, conquests, and butcheries, of ambition; the rapacity, injustice, and cruelties, of despotism; the sloth, lewdness, gluttony, and drunkenness, of the sensualist; the haughtiness, wrath, revenge, and murders, of the duellist; are nothing but selfishness, appearing in its true nature and genuine operations.

REMARKS.

In these observations we have another specimen of the havoc which philosophy has made of divine subjects, and of the great interests of man.

Few writers have been more admired and applauded than lord Shaftesbury; and, among all his writings, none have been more applauded, than the work in which the doctrine opposed by me is taught. Yet in this work we are informed, that to have any regard, either to future rewards or punishments, is mean and mercenary; and, of course, instead of being virtuous, or consisting with virtue, is only criminal. It must, therefore, be odious in the sight of God; and the proper object of his wrath and punishment. Accordingly, this writer informs us directly, that "*all reference, either to future rewards or punishments, lessens and destroys virtue, and diminishes the obligations to be virtuous.*" The anger

of God against a sinner is a dreadful punishment. The approbation of God, and his consequent love, are glorious rewards. But to regard this anger, to be afraid of it, to seek to avoid it, is, according to lord Shaftesbury, mean and mercenary, odious and wicked. The contrary conduct must, of course, bear the contrary character. It must be honourable and generous, spirited, amiable, and virtuous, to disregard the divine anger; to have no fear of God before our eyes; and willingly to become the objects of infinite indignation. Equally mean and mercenary, and therefore equally hateful and guilty, is it, in the eyes of this writer, to prize the approbation of God; to desire an interest in his love; or to seek the attainment of either. Of course, to disregard *both* must, according to this scheme, be virtuous, honourable, and deserving of commendation. The real nature of all conduct God cannot but know intuitively; and, without injustice, cannot fail to regard it according to its real nature, and treat the subjects of it as they actually merit. Hence, as he cannot but discern the meanness and mercenariness, the odiousness and guilt, of those who dread his anger, and seek to avoid it; who prize his approbation; and love and labour to obtain them; he is bound, he cannot fail, to punish them for this criminal conduct. As he equally discerns the virtue of those who disregard his anger, approbation, and love; he cannot fail to reward them.

If God is angry with any of his intelligent creatures, it is undoubtedly with those who have broken his law. That he has given a law to mankind, lord Shaftesbury himself acknowledges; nor does he deny, that mankind have, in some instances, broken this law. Indeed, it could not be denied with common decency. In this law, whatever it be, his pleasure is expressed and enjoined as the rule of duty to rational beings. This rule is, in his view, and therefore in fact, a wise, just, and good rule for the direction of their conduct. Conformity to it is conformity to what is wise, just, and good; or, in other words, is virtue, or excellence of character: while disobedience to it is opposition to what is wise, just, and good; or, in other words, sinfulness and turpitude of character. Every law, and this as truly as any other, annexes a reward to obedience, and a punishment to

disobedience; otherwise it could not be a law. But to regard either this reward or this punishment is, according to lord Shaftesbury, to be mean and mercenary; and so far, therefore, ceasing to be virtuous. If this reward and punishment *are to have no influence* on mankind; they are nugatory; and God has merely trifled with his creatures, in annexing them to his law. If they *are to have influence* on mankind; the influence is merely such as to destroy, or at least lessen, both virtue and the obligations to it. God, who sees this to be true, if it be truth, has, therefore, in annexing them to his law, and in endeavouring to influence mankind by them, attempted to destroy or lessen virtue, and to diminish their obligations to be virtuous.

Farther; as without rewards and penalties no law can exist; it is evident, that God cannot make a law, in which he must not, of course, either merely trifle with his creatures; or destroy or lessen virtue, and diminish their obligations to be virtuous.

The reward, promised to obedience in this and every other law, is happiness; and the punishment, threatened to disobedience, is suffering, or misery. To desire the happiness of every rational being, and our happiness as truly as that of others, is the genuine dictate of virtue; and the indispensable duty of all such beings. It is the duty, then, of every other rational being to desire our happiness; and for this plain reason; *it is in itself desirable.* According to lord Shaftesbury, then, we cannot, without being mean and mercenary, desire that which all other rational beings are bound to desire, and which is in itself desirable.

To be virtuous is the same thing as *to be meritorious, or to deserve a reward;* and is the only real desert in the universe. The reward which virtue deserves, is such treatment, as is a proper retribution to virtuous conduct; such a kind and measure of happiness, as it becomes the wisdom, justice, and goodness, of the lawgiver to communicate, as a proper expression of his approbation of that conduct. To be influenced by a regard to this happiness, although the very thing which his virtue has deserved, and which God has pronounced to be its proper reward, is, according to this scheme, to become mean and mercenary, and undeserving of the reward itself. The reward is holden

out by God, to encourage his creatures to be virtuous. In doing this, according to lord Shaftesbury, he discourages virtue, and lessens their obligations to be virtuous.

There are *two kinds of original good; enjoyment, and deliverance from suffering;* or, as the case may be, *from the danger of suffering.* These two are the only possible objects of desire to percipient beings; and to intelligent beings as truly as any others. When virtue itself is desired, it is desired only for the enjoyment which it furnishes. Were there no such objects in the universe, there would be no such thing as desire; and consequently no such thing as volition, or action. Percipient beings, and among them intelligent beings, would be as absolutely inactive, as so many lumps of matter. But, according to lord Shaftesbury, *to regard future enjoyment or misery,* and for the very same reasons *to regard them when present,* is to be mean and mercenary, and to cease from being virtuous. He who regards them, therefore, cannot be virtuous: he who does not, must of course be a block.

In the mean time, *not to regard enjoyment and suffering, when present to our view, is physically impossible.* In order to be virtuous, then, we must in every instance accomplish a physical impossibility.

Finally; *a moral government is entirely founded on motives.* All motives are included in the two kinds of good mentioned above. In every moral government these motives are presented to the subjects of it, by the law on which it is founded, in the forms of reward and punishment, both necessarily future, to obedience or disobedience. On the influence which these motives have upon the moral character and conduct of the subjects, all moral government rests; nor can any such government exist for a moment without them. But to be influenced by them is, in every subject of such government, according to this scheme, mean and mercenary. *God, therefore, in establishing a moral government over intelligent creatures, has directly endeavoured, by his authority, to render them mean and mercenary; and, so far as this influence extends, has prevented them from being virtuous.*

It is, I presume, unnecessary to add any thing farther. More striking or more conclusive evidence cannot be

given of the havoc made by philosophy in the moral system. If the doctrines of one of her most admired votaries end in these consequences; what absurdities are we not to expect from philosophers of every inferior order?

SERMON LXXXI.

REGENERATION.

ITS ATTENDANTS. BROTHERLY LOVE.

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.—JOHN XIII. 34.

IN the three preceding discourses, I have considered *the nature of evangelical benevolence;* and the two principal *objections against the doctrine, which teaches the existence and explains the nature of this attribute.* At the present time I propose to examine *the last of those characteristics which were mentioned as attendants on regeneration;* viz. *brotherly love; or the love which is due to the disciples of Christ.*

Commentators have, to a considerable extent at least, considered this command of Christ as merely enjoining benevolence. They observe, that it is called *new,* not because it had not been given before; for, they say, it had been published by Moses, and other writers of the Old Testament; but because of its peculiar excellence; remarking, at the same time, that the Hebrews customarily denoted the peculiar excellence of a thing *by styling it new.* With this view of the subject I cannot accord. *The command,* given to the apostles, and by consequence to all the followers of Christ, *to love one another,* was, not in my view, published by Moses, nor by any of the succeeding prophets. Certainly it was not published in form. There is not in the Old Testament, at least I have not been able to find in it,

any command requiring good men to love each other as good men. The general benevolence of the gospel towards all men, whether friends or enemies, is indeed abundantly enjoined both by Moses and the prophets. But this benevolence regards men merely as intelligent beings, capable of happiness; and is itself *the love of happiness*, as heretofore explained. The love required in the text, is *the love of good men, as such;* as the followers of Christ; as wearing his image; as resembling him in their moral character. This love, in modern language, is called *complacency*, or *the love of virtue.* Instead of being benevolence, it is *a delight in that benevolence;* and is directed, not towards *the happiness of intelligent beings*, but towards *the virtue of good beings.*

A command enjoining this love was, I think, never given in form before Christ gave it in the text: and was therefore *new* in the proper sense at that time. That it is not called new on account of its superior excellence, will be reasonably believed, if we remember that Christ in no other case applies the epithet in this manner; that the *first and the great command of the law* is still more excellent; as is also *the second;* which, while it may be considered as implying this affection, enjoins directly that universal goodwill, which is the object of brotherly love, and the voluntary source of all happiness.

"But," it is said, "St. John expressly declares this commandment of Christ not to be new in the proper sense," 1 John ii. 7; *Brethren, I write unto you no new commandment; but an old commandment, which ye had from the beginning.* Without inquiring what St. John intends here by the phrase *from the beginning*, it may be justly observed, that this passage has no reference to the subject in question. The command of which he speaks, is in the preceding verse expressed in these words: *He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk even as he walked.* It will not be pretended, that this is the command in the text.

In the *eighth*, that is the following verse, St. John declares the command in the text to be a new commandment. *Again, a new commandment write I unto you.* What the new command is to which he here refers, is evident from the two

following verses. *He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.* The apostle does not indeed recite any command in form; but in the phrases, *he that hateth, and he that loveth, his brother*, he shews decisively, that he refers to the command, enjoining this love, and forbidding this hatred; or, in other words, to the command in the text. But the command to which he refers, he declares to be a new command.

There is, however, another passage in this writer which, at first view, appears to be less easily reconcilable with my assertions. It is this; *And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.* 2 John 5. That St. John here referred to the general benevolence required in the second command of the moral law is, I think, clearly evident from the following verse; *And this is love, that we keep his commandments. This is the commandment, that, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.* The love of which he had spoken to the elect lady, in the preceding verse, he himself explains in this. *And this is love, that we keep his commandments.* As if he had said, "The love which I have mentioned, is the disposition with which we keep the commandments of God; or, in other words, the general benevolence enjoined by the law." St. Paul, speaking of the same thing, has expressed the same sentiment more clearly, as well as more concisely: Rom. xiii. 10, *Love is the fulfilling of the law.*

Having, as I hope, removed all the objections of any importance against the interpretation of the text adapted above, I shall now proceed to a more particular consideration of this attribute.

I. *Brotherly love is an affection differing in many respects from benevolence.*

Thus, for example, brotherly love is confined to good men as its objects: whereas benevolence extends to all mankind. Brotherly love respects only the moral character of its objects: benevolence, their existence and capacity. Bro-

therly love is the love of the virtue; benevolence, of the happiness of those who are loved. Benevolence is virtue absolutely, or universally: brotherly love is only a branch of that virtue. Benevolence exists and operates towards those who have no virtue; and was thus exercised by God towards beings totally lost and depraved; *viz.* towards mankind, while wholly under the power of sin. In a similar manner it is exercised by good men towards sinners; and towards such sinners, as by being enemies to them on account of their goodness prove, that there is no goodness in themselves. Brotherly love is exercised, and is capable of being exercised, only towards virtuous men; and towards them on account of their virtue only. Benevolence, being virtue in the absolute sense, must exist, before it can be loved. Brotherly love is the love of that benevolence, or of virtue, after it is known to have existed.

According to these observations we find these affections clearly and abundantly distinguished in the Scriptures. Thus benevolence is called αγαπη throughout the New Testament; and, as exercised particularly towards mankind, is termed φιλανθρωπια: Acts xxviii. 2; Titus iii. 4. Brotherly love is called φιλαδελφια: Rom. xii. 10; 1 Thess. iv. 9; Heb. xiii. 1; 2 Pet. i. 7. Love to the brethren or brotherhood, αδελφοτης, is enjoined in various places as a peculiar duty. Thus St. Peter, in his Second Epistle i. 7, says, *Add to your faith virtue, or resolution,* &c., *to godliness, brotherly love,* φιλαδελφιαν, *and to brotherly love, charity,* αγαπην; benevolence. Were brotherly love the same with benevolence, St. Peter would certainly not have directed Christians to add benevolence to itself. Nor would he here have called the same thing by different names, and thus perplexed his readers, merely for the sake of rounding a period.

Other directions generally resembling this, are given us abundantly in the New Testament.

II. *Brotherly love is the love of good men.*

To prove this, I observe, that *the brethren*, spoken of in the New Testament, are always *disciples of Christ*. This name Christ himself gave them in form. In Matt. xii. 46,

we are told, that *his mother and his brethren came desiring to see him.* Upon receiving notice of this fact from one of the company, he replied, *Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? Then he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren: for whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, my sister, and mother.* In Luke viii. 21, where the same story is recorded, his words are, *My mother and my brethren are they, who hear the word of God, and do it.* Again, Matt. xxiii. 8, he says, *Be ye not called rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.*

In these passages Christ has declared, that his disciples are his brethren: that these are composed of such as hear and obey the word of God; and that all such persons sustain this character.

From him the apostles took this phraseology, and continued it through their writings.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born of many brethren. Rom. viii. 29.

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, who are at Colosse. Col. i. 2.

I charge you by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. 1 Thes. v. 27.

These passages from St. Paul, selected out of a multitude of the same import, are ample proofs, that he used the language of Christ in the same sense. Peter, James, and John, use the same language. It is therefore completely evident, that the brethren, spoken of appropriately in the New Testament, are Christ's disciples; are saints; are faithful; are holy; are such as have been sanctified by the Spirit of grace. In this character only are they constituted the objects of brotherly love; the character itself being the thing which in them is required by Christ to be loved. It is indeed true, now, as formerly, that *all who are of Israel are not Israel.* Some, who appear to be Christ's disciples, are not really his disciples. But since our limited minds are unable to distinguish appearance from reality, God has commanded us to govern both our views and our con-

duct by appearance. So long then as men appear to be the disciples of Christ, we are bound to regard and particularly to love them as his disciples.

III. *Brotherly love is therefore an affection directed towards the virtue of those whom we love:* in other words it is *complacency in virtue.*

In the exercise of benevolence, we love others whenever we wish them to be happy; and in this manner we love our enemies, and wicked men universally, however destitute of moral goodness. Our benevolence will indeed be particularly exerted in desiring earnestly, that they may become virtuous, in order to their happiness; but we cannot approve nor love their moral character; because, by the supposition, it is wholly sinful, and therefore altogether odious.

In the exercise of brotherly love, on the contrary, we approve and love the moral character of all whom we love; delighting in their holiness, as an excellent and desirable object. As we approve of the character of Christ himself; so we delight in *them,* as possessing a share of the same beauty and excellence; as *having the same mind which was also in him.*

IV. *Brotherly love is, in the Scriptures, constituted a peculiar proof of sanctification.*

In the verse following the text, Christ says, *Hereby shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* Here our Saviour declares this affection to be a peculiar proof to the world that we are Christians; to be the touchstone by which his disciples will be examined and known by mankind.

Accordingly, the emperor Julian expressly warns the Heathen under his dominion, that the Christians contributed not a little to spread Christianity by their singular love to each other, and by their mutual offices of exemplary kindness. At the same time he declares, that unless the Heathen will follow this powerful example, their religion will never prosper. So remarkable, even in that corrupted age, was the brotherly love of Christ's disciples, as entirely to distinguish them fron. the rest of mankind. In other pe-

riods of the church it has prevailed as religion has prevailed; and decayed, as religion has decayed: but in all ages it has existed, and been discernible, wherever genuine Christianity has been found.

As this attribute is peculiarly the proof of our religion to others; so it is made equally the proof of it to ourselves. *He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light.* 1 John ii. 9, 10. *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.*

Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God; nor he that loveth not his brother. 1 John iii. 10.

Hereby we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that hateth his brother abideth in death.

These passages teach in the clearest manner, that if we love the brethren, we are children of God, or the subjects of evangelical virtue, and that if we love not the brethren, we are not the children of God. If then our love to the brethren be probable; if a good reason exist to believe, that we exercise brotherly love; there exists an equal reason to believe that *we have passed from death unto life.* If we discover with certainty, that we possess this love; we have arrived at full assurance of our sanctification, and of our title to eternal life.

V. *Brotherly love is universally exercised by benevolent minds.*

In other words, every mind which is evangelically benevolent, will of course exercise brotherly love.

Benevolence is the love of happiness: brotherly love is the love of that benevolence. We love an intelligent being as either capable of happiness, or actually the subject of it: when we perceive that he is benevolent, we farther love his benevolence and him because he is benevolent.

Benevolence is virtue. Brotherly love, in the abstract denominated complacency, is the love of virtue. As virtue delights in happiness, so it necessarily delights in the causes of happiness: but virtue is the only original, voluntary, and supreme cause of happiness to the universe. Virtue, therefore, delights in virtue, as being the great cause

of that which it supremely loves. As virtue is the voluntary cause of happiness, it is of course supremely excellent and lovely, and is accordingly loved by all virtuous beings.

Hence it is evident that brotherly love, although not virtue in the original or abstract sense, is yet an affection eminently virtuous; and is therefore strongly enjoined and greatly commended in the Scriptures. This is the love which without a formal command David exercised towards *the saints,* whom he styles *the excellent of the earth,* and *in whom,* he says, *was all his delight;* which the captive Psalmist exercised towards *Zion,* the collection of the saints; and sooner than refuse which, he wishes *his right hand may forget its cunning, and his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth.* This is the love which inspired the prophets, particularly Isaiah, with zeal, and joy, and triumph, when beholding in vision the future prosperity of the church, and its glorious extension over the habitable world.

The distinction between brotherly love and complacency, generally understood, is this: *the former is exercised by the disciples of Christ towards each other; the latter by all virtuous beings towards all such beings.* This is the love which God exercises towards all his children; the love exercised by angels towards those for whom they cheerfully condescend to be *ministering spirits; viz. those who shall be heirs of salvation.*

Towards God the complacency of his virtuous creatures is so eminent an exercise of affection, as in a manner to occupy the whole soul. When we remember the moral perfection of God, we are prone to forget his importance as the supreme intelligent, and the possessor of supreme happiness, and naturally confine our thoughts to the glorious excellence of his nature: we love him pre-eminently for this excellence; and scarcely recollect that he is an object of supreme benevolence. Indeed, whenever the beings loved are wholly virtuous, we are apt to lose our benevolence in our complacency, and to be scarcely conscious of any other affection besides our delight in their excellence of character. When, indeed, we have received peculiar benefits from them our *gratitude* is excited, and often powerfully; but our benevolence, though always exercised, is not unfrequently unobserved by our minds.

Thus have I summarily considered this attribute of a sanctified mind. I shall now proceed to derive from this subject a few

REMARKS.

1st. *If the things which have been observed concerning this subject are just, it follows that we ought carefully to try our moral character by this great scriptural standard.*

By him who hopes that he is entitled to eternal life, no question can be asked of higher moment than whether he is a Christian. To resolve this question the Scriptures point out no method more obviously or certainly effectual, than that which has been here mentioned. *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* A good man is a peculiar object, and distinct from all others: the materials of which his goodness is constituted are generally capable of being truly understood and strongly realized: if seen, they cannot but be hated by a bad, and loved by a good mind: our love and hatred are engaged almost only by moral beings. Doctrines, precepts, and ordinances, the sabbath, the sanctuary, the word of God, and the things opposed to them, may, indeed, be in a certain sense objects of these affections; but this can exist only in a subordinate degree, and perhaps always with a reference to those moral beings with whom they are connected: thus the sabbath is hated or loved, merely as a season devoted to God who appointed it. The same observation is equally applicable to other things of the like nature.

But intelligent beings *viz.* God and his rational creatures, we love or hate for what they *are:* we love or hate them directly, and not for the relation which they bear to some other object of these affections. Men, particularly, being like or unlike ourselves, of our own party or an opposite, who act or refuse to act with or against us, with and against whom *we* act under the strong influence of sympathy, and who are realized by the powerful impressions of sense; are more easily, uniformly, and strongly, regarded with these emotions, in ordinary circumstances, than any other created beings. Our emotions towards them therefore are immediate, arise spontaneously, are vigorous, and mingle

with all our views of every kind: good men love good men of course and necessarily: wicked men never exercise complacency towards good men as such; they often love them with natural affection, or because they are their friends, or because they are useful to them, but not for their characteristical excellence, or for their resemblance to Christ. Good men love them as the natural taste relishes sweetness or fragrance, the rose or the honeycomb: good men love them for themselves, for the moral character which they possess, and independently of all other considerations. Wicked men in their consciences *approve of* goodness, and of good men, and cannot, without violence done to their consciences, disapprove of them. But in this approbation the heart has no share. The hearts of wicked men are radically opposed to virtue, and of course hate it, and so far as their virtue is concerned, all those by whom it is possessed: hence have flowed the calumnies, sneers, ridicule, resentment, opposition, and persecution, which good men have received from their enemies ever since the world began.

From these things it is evident that the love of good men furnishes a criterion uncommonly well calculated to decide our character, as being either good or evil: whatever will aid us in a case of such magnitude must be of high importance, and ought to be employed for our benefit with earnestness and fidelity. From the Scriptures, and indeed from the nature of the case also, it is evident, that brotherly love furnishes us with peculiar assistance for the determination of a point so interesting to every Christian. How attentively ought every man then, and especially every one who hopes that himself is a Christian, to examine his character by this standard. Let each ask himself, "Do I love good men? Do I love their goodness, their Christianity? Do I choose their company? Do I seek their conversation? Do I delight in their sentiments and conduct? Do I pray for their prosperity, their holiness, and their salvation?" If these questions can be truly answered in the affirmative, we are children of God: if not, we are still *in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity.*

2dly. *From these considerations we discern the peculiar*

wisdom and goodness of Christ in establishing a church in the world.

In the church of Christ the body of good men are gathered together, united in one family, placed in one obvious view, and prepared to render as well as to receive brotherly love and all its kind offices. Every affection flourishes by exercise and repetition only. Where the proper objects of our affections are found, they are exercised of course; where such objects are not found, they decay and die of themselves. In families the natural domestic affections of man find their proper objects. Conjugal love, therefore, parental tenderness, brotherly and sisterly kindness, and filial piety, shoot up here, and thrive, and blossom, and bear fruit, and bear it abundantly.

In the church, the *family named after Christ*, are assembled the objects of brotherly love, or evangelical complacency. Here such as are the subjects of this exalted attribute, find those presented to them on whom it may be exercised and repeated: accordingly here, and in the nature of things here only, can this affection live and prosper. Here, on the one hand, virtue is daily seen, approved, and loved; and, on the other, complacency interchanged, strengthened, and enjoyed. While those who are thus the objects of love, are by every motive which can reach a virtuous mind, invited, animated, and compelled to render themselves more deserving of this affection by improving and adorning those excellences which are its immediate objects. Brotherly love becomes here a peculiar refined and glorious friendship; a bond of perfection, uniting them more and more unto the end. Thus, by the establishment of a church in the world, has Christ provided for the existence, continuance, and improvement, of this elevated affection. In the mean time, as brotherly love exists in this heaven-appointed family, so in the bosom of the same family it operates unceasingly in all the amiable and useful methods directed by the Scriptures, and pointed to by itself with a magnetic influence. Here it reproves all the variations from truth, all the deviations from rectitude, to which imperfect man even in his best estate is liable on this side of the grave. Here it approves and confirms every thing that is vindicable and lovely. Here it prays for the

strength, amendment, comfort, peace, and joy, of its brethren. Here it weeps with them in their sorrows, rejoices in their joys, and smiles on all their delightful progress in holiness; refines in the view of their refinement, exults in their advancement to immortal life, and expands its wings for the final flight to everlasting glory.

3dly. *This subject forcibly impresses on our minds the excellence, glory, and happiness, of heaven.*

In this apostate and melancholy world, wise men in all ages have seen and felt that virtue has been a stranger, a pilgrim, and in many instances an outcast also. Her friends have been few and commonly powerless; her enemies mighty and strong, bitter and distressing; her cause unpopular and hated; her arguments lost in deaf ears; and her entreaties repelled by hearts of marble. It is reasonable, it is desirable, it is "devoutly to be wished" and prayed for, that virtue may somewhere find a home, a settled residence, a kind welcome, real friends, and final safety. These blessings she has rarely found in this foreign region, this unnatural climate, and at the best she has found them but for a moment; accordingly she has ever cast her eyes upward towards another and *better country:* from that country she has received tidings which cannot deceive, and which assure her of a welcome and final reception: she is informed, that there she was born and nursed; and that in this world she is only a visitor and stranger, destined to finish the pilgrimage allotted, and then to return to her native residence, there to dwell for ever: with rapture she has learned that there all her friends will be finally gathered, and that her Father and everlasting Friend is there ready to receive her to the arms of infinite and unchangeable love.

In that glorious world a vast and immortal church, formed of those who are all brethren, inhabits the delightful regions destined to be its eternal residence. In the innumerable millions of which this great assembly, this nation of brethren, this kingdom of JEHOVAH, is composed, brotherly love is the commanding principle of action. In angels it has glowed and brightened ever since the morning of creation dawned over the vast abyss of darkness and solitude. In the general assembly of the first-born it is

made a test of their character, and a foundation of their admission into heaven. *Inasmuch as ye have done good unto one of the least of these my brethren,* is by Christ himself announced as the peculiar term of admission: and *Inasmuch as ye did it not,* as the term of final exclusion. In the cold and dreary region of this world the spark was scarcely kindled, and prolonged its existence with difficulty: *the flax* in which it was kept from final extinction *smoked* merely without rising into a flame; but it was never finally *quenched.* At the great examination it was found still a living spark, and its existence was seen, acknowledged, and proclaimed: transferred to heaven it began there to kindle with new and immortal lustre, and was set in that constellated firmament of living and eternal splendours, which are all *glorious* with inherent light, although *one star differeth from another star in glory.*

Of that brilliant world, that region where all things shine, and live, and flourish, and triumph, for ever, the beauty, the glory, the excellence, is eminently this divine affection. All are brethren; all are loved as brethren. All are divinely amiable and excellent friends. Every one possesses the virtue which is loved, and the complacency by which it is loved. Every one, conscious of unmingled purity within, approves and loves himself for that divine image, which, in complete perfection, and with untarnished resemblance, is instamped on his character. Each, in every view which he casts around him, beholds the same glory shining, and brightening, in the endless train of his companions: one in nature, but diversified without end, in those forms and varieties of excellence, by which the original and eternal beauty delights to present itself to the virtuous universe. Here every one, conscious of being entirely lovely, and entirely loved, reciprocates the same love to that *great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, kindreds, and tongues,* and which fills the immeasurable regions of heaven. Out of this character grows a series ever varying, ever improving, of all the possible communications of beneficence, fitted in every instance only to interchange and increase the happiness of all. In the sunshine of infinite complacency, the light of the new Jerusalem, the original source of all their own beauty, life, and joy, all these hap-

py *nations walk* for ever; and, transported with the life-giving influence, unite in one harmonious and eternal hymn to the great Author of their enjoyment; *Blessing, and honour, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever.* Amen.

SERMON LXXXII.

CONSEQUENCES OF REGENERATION. ADOPTION.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God.—1 JOHN III. 2.

IN a series of discourses, I have considered *the attendants of regeneration:* viz. *faith,* formerly explained; *repentance; love to God; love to mankind;* and *brotherly love.* I shall now proceed, according to the scheme formerly proposed, to examine *the consequences of this change of character.*

Of these the first in the natural order is *adoption.* That adoption is a consequence of regeneration will not be denied. The observations, which I shall make concerning the subject, will be included under the following heads:

I. *The nature;*
II. *The reality;*
III. *The importance;* and,
IV. *The consequences; of adoption.*

I. *The nature of adoption may be explained in the following manner.*

A child is, in this act, taken by a man from a family not his own; introduced into his own family; regarded as his own child; and entitled to all the privileges and blessings belonging to this relation. To adopt children in this manner has, it is well known, been a custom generally prevailing in all ages, and probably in all nations. Thus children

were adopted among the Egyptians, Jews, Romans, and other ancient nations; and the same customexists in the *Christian nations of Europe; in our own country; among the American aborigines;* and, so far as my knowledge extends, throughout the world.

Of the same general nature is that transaction, in the divine economy, by which mankind become the children of God.

II. *The reality of adoption may be thus illustrated.*

Mankind are originally strangers to the family of God; enemies to him, to his law, to his kingdom, and to all his interests. From this situation they are invited to come, and enter into his family; to take his name upon them; to share in his parental care, tenderness, and blessings. Such of them as comply with the invitation are received into his family; and become entitled to his parental love, and all the offices of affection to which it gives birth. From this period they are styled the children of God. From this period, they are permitted, and required, to address him as their Father; a character which he has been pleased to assume; and to consider themselves as his children; and as entitled to the character of his children.

Of this subject the Scriptures give us the following exhibition.

1st. *God announced the adoption of mankind into his family soon after the apostacy.*

At the birth of Enos, we are told, that *men began to call upon the name of the Lord.* In the margin, and, as it would seem, with greater correctness, *men began to be called by the name of the Lord:** that is, they began to be called his children, and to take upon themselves the name of God, as being now their parent; just as adopted children take upon themselves the names of those human parents, by whom they have been adopted. The style by which they began to be known at this early period, has been continued through every succeeding age of the church. In Gen. vi. 1, 2, we read of *the sons of God.* These, I apprehend, are persons of the same class with those, who, in the time of Enos, *began to be called by the name of the Lord;* and were

* Taylor.

now publicly designated by this title. That such persons were meant by the phrase, *the sons of God*, is sufficiently manifest from the use of it elsewhere. In Job i. 6 it is said, *the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord:* and in Job xxxviii. 7, that, at the creation, *the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.* In these passages, angels are undoubtedly the persons intended. When mankind, in those early days, received the same appellation, it was designed to indicate, that they belonged to the same family, and were by adoption children of the same heavenly parent.

In the communications made by God to Abraham and his family, the same scheme is more particularly and explicitly pursued. God, in the covenant of grace, declared to this earthly *father of the faithful, I will be your God; and ye shall be my people:* phraseology, exactly equivalent, in the mouth of the speaker, to the following: *I will be your father; and ye shall be my children.* In conformity to this scheme, Moses was directed, Exod. iv. 22, to preface his message from God to Pharaoh with *Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my first-born.* In the same manner Moses declared the same relation, Deut. xiv. 1, *Ye are the children of the Lord your God.* In Ps. lxxxii. 6, it is said to the rulers of Israel, *All of you are children of the Most High.* In the latter days of their kingdom, when they had become deeply depraved, they were still called by the title of children. Thus they are styled *rebellious children; corruptors; lying children, that will not hear the word of the Lord.*

By the prophet Hosea it was again predicted, that *they should be called the sons of God* when gathered again, after their dispersion. *It shall be said of them, Ye are the sons of the living God.*

This character thus insisted on through the several ages of the Jewish church, is more particularly and strongly insisted on in the New Testament. Here the important fact of our adoption is declared in the most explicit manner, and in a great variety of forms. In Eph. i. 5 it is said, that Christians *were predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to God, according to the good pleasure of his will.* Agreeably to this determination, it is declared,

John i. 12, that *to as many as received Christ, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. Who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* To persons of this character St. Paul says, *But ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* These passages are amply sufficient to shew the scriptural views of the reality of adoption. It would be useless therefore to quote a multitude of others of similar import.

2dly. *The same doctrine is forcibly taught in the ordinance of baptism.*

The ordinance of baptism is a solemn symbol of regeneration. By the affusion of the water upon every subject of this ordinance is exhibited, in a very affecting manner, the effusion of the Spirit of grace upon his heart; and by the cleansing influence of the water, the purification of his soul by the blood of Christ. In the administration of this ordinance, every subject of it *is baptized,* by the command of Christ, εις το ονομα, *into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* In this manner baptism is a direct exhibition of our adoption into the family of God, and our rightful assumption of the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Accordingly, Christians are in the Scriptures entitled after these names, Godly, Christian, and Spiritual. The ordinance, it is true, is, as from the nature of the case it must be, external and symbolical. But the symbol is easy, intelligible, and plainly indicative of the adoption of Christians into *the family which is named after Christ.*

III. *The importance of adoption may be illustrated from the following considerations:*

1st. *The act of adoption produces a real relation in us to God.*

In reading the Scriptures, a book so fraught with figurative language, it is no unnatural, and I believe not a very uncommon thing, for persons to regard whatever is said on this subject as a mere collection of fine phraseology, intended to express, with strength and beauty, the dignity of the Christian's character, and the desirableness of his situation; and not to denote a real and important part of the

scheme of redemption. This, however, is an erroneous mode of thinking concerning the subject. We are in fact strangers to the divine family; and have ceased to be, in any sense, useful to ourselves, and dutiful children of God. We have allied ourselves voluntarily to strangers, and *become aliens from the commonwealth of* the spiritual Israel. In this manner we have wandered and remained, far off from God; and, but for his mercy employed to bring us back, had widened our distance from his house and favour for ever. In this situation, we were related to him only as froward and rebellious creatures; and were objects only of his eternal indignation. But when we are adopted into his family, we become his children anew; are acknowledged as such; and shall be treated as such throughout eternity. The act by which we are adopted, and which creates this relation, is also a publication of it to the universe; solemnly announcing to the subjects of the divine kingdom, that henceforth we are regarded by God as his children; that he will be *a father to us;* and that we *shall be his sons and daughters;* that the name, the duties, and the privileges, of children will henceforth be rightfully ours.

2dly. *This relation is very near, and very interesting.*

In the original condition of mankind, they stood related to God by creation and preservation. This, considered as the state of intelligent beings, is a relation of high and interesting importance. Adam accordingly, on account of this relation, is, together with the angels, dignified with the title of *a son of God.* See Luke iii. 38.

This relation is often insisted on with much magnificence by the ancient Heathen sages; who exhibited their views of it in a variety of bold and strong images. Particularly they represented the soul of man as an emanation from God; as a part of the divine mind; separated for a season, to return again and be reabsorbed by the original source of perfection; as a beam of divine light: a particle of ethereal fire; sent forth from the uncreated Sun, to be reunited hereafter to its parent Orb. It will be easily seen from these representations, what stress they laid upon our divine original; and it will be not less easily seen, that the more perfect views of the original mind furnished by the Scriptures, enhance exceedingly the honour and importance derived to us from this source.

But though it is honourable to an intelligent being, that God was pleased to bring him into existence, and endow him with such noble faculties; yet in the adoption of the covenant of grace, a much nearer, dearer, and more exalted, relation is formed and finished. In this proceeding, God takes rebels, sinners, and outcasts, and with immense exertions, and with means most wonderful, brings them back into his family and favour. They were before created and preserved: now they are redeemed, sanctified, and forgiven. An act of creative power was before exerted to bring them into being, and of preserving power to continue them in being; but now Christ has been made man, has lived, suffered, and died; has descended into the grave; risen again; sat down on the right hand of God; and begun an eternal intercession; that they may be restored to the character of children, and to the blessings which flow from infinite love. The Spirit of God has also, with infinite condescension, patience, and kindness, sanctified, enlightened, quickened, and purified, them unto the end. The Father of spirits has formed and completed a new dispensation in the universe, a dispensation of grace and forgiveness, for their sakes; has forgiven and justified them; and readmitted them to his kingdom and everlasting love. These are all new, great, and glorious, things; things which have been done for no other.

Correspondent with the degree of that which is done or suffered by any intelligent being for any other, is their mutual love. He for whom most is done, and to whom most is forgiven, will naturally love the most. This is directly taught by Christ in his parable of the two debtors, recorded Luke vii. 40; *And Jesus answering, said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee; and he said, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor who had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence; the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose, he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.* In proportion then, to what has been done for the redeemed, will be their love, and the cause of it also throughout eternity.

On the other hand, he who does or suffers much for others, loves them also in proportion to what he has done

and suffered. This truth is abundantly evident in all human concerns. A father loves his child, when sick, and distressed, and needing much at his hands, more tenderly than those of his children who are healthy and prosperous. A friend in the like circumstances, loves his friend more than before; and a patriot his country.

The same doctrine is also taught by Christ, in *the parables of the ten pieces of silver*, and *the hundred sheep;* and is appealed to by St. Paul in that memorable passage; *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not, with him, also freely give us all things?* But God has done more, Christ has suffered more, *for the redeemed*, than has been done or suffered for any others. Of course they are loved more, in proportion to their importance in the universe, than any others. For this, as one reason, *there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance.* The fact, that they have been once *lost*, and have been *found* again; that they have been once *dead* and *live* anew; and that their restoration has been accomplished by so much exertion and suffering; will render this event an object of peculiar interest, and them objects of peculiar tenderness, throughout eternity.

Thus the redeemed are brought into a near relation to God; nearer than that of mere intelligent creatures, in proportion to the greatness of the things which have been done and suffered to bring it into being.

3dly. *This relation is eternal.*

Those who are once redeemed, sustain this character for ever. The song, which ascribes *blessing, and honour, and glory, to the Lamb who was slain, and who hath redeemed us to God by his blood*, is begun in the present world, and continued throughout all successive ages. But it does not terminate here. It is renewed in heaven; and will be continued throughout its everlasting duration. In that happy world, they will be joint heirs with Christ to *the inheritance which is undefiled, and fadeth not away.* There they will *behold his glory*, even *the glory which he had with the Father before ever the world was.* Throughout their interminable existence they will ever sustain the peculiar character of redeemed creatures; will be regarded by God, and the

virtuous universe, as the trophies of Christ's mediation, as monuments of forgiving and sanctifying love. In this character they will regard themselves; and will feel its import with a gratitude suited to the greatness of the blessings which they have received.

It is this consideration which stamps the peculiar value on the relation in question. All that is temporary and perishable is, in its nature, comparatively of little importance. Time, necessarily fading in itself, imparts its own character to every thing under its dominion. The remembrance, that an enjoyment will come to an end, embitters it, even while it is in possession; and after a period, which must soon arrive, it will be destroyed for ever. No possession therefore ought ever to engage the ardent attachment of an immortal mind, unless made sure by the seal of eternity.

4thly. *This relation will become more and more interesting for ever.*

The mind which is received into heaven through the mediation of the Redeemer, will more and more understand the nature of the blessings to which it has been admitted. From the sufferings of those who are lost, it will learn the greatness of the evils from which itself has been delivered; and from their obstinate continuance in sin, the hopeless nature of its own former state, had it not been for the atonement of Christ, and the sanctifying agency of the Holy Spirit. In the happiness of heaven it will see and feel the vastness and multitude of the enjoyments to which it has been introduced; and in the perfection and loveliness of itself, and of all its companions, the transcendent excellence of that character, which was mercifully begun in it here, to be improved for ever. In proportion as its views of these subjects expand, it will discern, more and more clearly, the importance of those wonderful things, which have been done to deliver it from endless sin and misery, and to instate it in endless virtue and happiness. In this manner it will advance continually, together with all glorified saints, towards the comprehension of what *is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and will more and more know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.* As the sense of these divine subjects increases in the heart, its admiration, complacency, and gratitude, will rise continually higher; its beauty

and amiableness daily increase; and itself become daily a more delightful object of the divine approbation.

IV. *The consequences of adoption are great and desirable.*

I have observed above, that the relation produced by this event, is real. Every real relation involves real rights and obligations; duties to be performed on our part; and on the part of God, blessings, to the communication of which he has been pleased to oblige himself by his own gracious promises. The relation introduced into existence, by the act of adoption, between him and his redeemed children, involves in its consequences a long train of rights and obligations, duties and blessings. Of these a few only can be mentioned at the present time; and even these must be mentioned in a summary manner.

The consequences of adoption respect either the present world, or the world to come.

In the present world, God,

1st. *Provides sustenance for his children.*

God provides for the wants of all creatures; not only for mankind, but for animals. *The young lions seek their meat from God; and he satisfieth the young ravens when they cry.* But the provision which he makes for the wants of his children, is distinguished from that which he makes for others, by this important consideration; that *it is exactly that which is best for them.* In kind, in degree, in manner, it is just such as most promotes their real welfare. Were any difference to exist in their circumstances; had they more, or had they less; or were their supplies to be varied in any other manner; or were their situation, in this respect, to be at all different from what it actually is; their true interest would be less perfectly consulted. *All things,* in this respect, *work together for the good of them that love God; and they that seek the Lord do not want any good thing.*

The provision made for them, differs also from that made for their fellow-men in another important particular. They are assured by his promise, that *this provision will always be made for them* while they live. They have, therefore, an indefeasible right to expect all the blessings of this nature which they need: a right founded on the unchangeable covenant of grace; on *the truth of God, which is as the great*

mountains, steadfast and immoveable; and on his promises, which endure for ever. Every one of them may therefore say with David, *The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*

Finally, there is yet another difference between the provision made for their wants, and that made for others; viz. *that the good furnished to them is a series, not of enjoyments merely, but of blessings.* As such, they are not only permitted, but required, to regard them. They may therefore, without fear or danger, partake of them as such; and relish entirely whatever comfort they convey. They are sweetness without a sting; fragrance without a thorn, planted beneath to embitter the enjoyment. The pleasure which they contain, is also enhanced unceasingly by the delightful emotion of gratitude with which they are always attended.

2dly. *He protects them.*

The exposure of mankind, from the cradle to the grave, to evil in an endless variety of forms, even when the danger is wholly unseen and unimagined, has ever been the favourite topic of the moralist, and a standing dictate of human experience. Every day instructs us, that against this exposure no human foresight can effectually provide. *Except the Lord keep the city, the* most diligent *watchman waketh in vain. But he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.* Of his children *the Lord is the keeper. The Lord is their shade upon their right hand. The sun shall not smite them by day, nor the moon by night; the Lord shall preserve them from all evil: he shall preserve their souls. The Lord shall preserve their going out, and their coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore. Therefore when they pass through the waters, he will be with them, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow them; when they walk through the fire, they shall not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon them. In all the situations of life, his eye is upon them for good. They may fall indeed, because* it is necessary, because it is best for them; *yet they shall rise again, and shall not be utterly cast down.* At the same time, the means of defence will be provided for them, in season, apparently hopeless, and in ways utterly unexpected. Enemies are restrained; evils averted; dangers dissipated;

friends raised up; the course of Providence changed; and thus, even when they are *encompassed with the terrors of death, and the snares of hell, God is their fortress, their high tower, the rock of their salvation.*

3dly. *He instructs them.*

This work he accomplishes by his providence, by his word, by his ordinances, by his ministers, by the life and conversation of Christians, by the divine example of his Son, and by the peculiar communications of his Spirit. In all these ways, he furnishes them with whatever knowledge and whatever useful impressions they need to receive; and trains them up as children in an effectual preparation for the perfect state of manhood, to which they will arrive in his heavenly kingdom.

This however is the peculiar office of the Spirit of truth. As he originally revealed the truth of God concerning our salvation; so, throughout their earthly pilgrimage, he discloses to the children of God the divine import of his own instructions, and gives them eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand and obey his own glorious precepts. He teaches them the true evangelical use of religious ordinances, of trials, of afflictions, and of blessings; dissolves their doubts; removes their perplexities; shews them the path of life; takes them by the hand, and guides them through the mazes of this earthly wilderness to the heavenly Canaan.

All those who are the sons of God, are, as St. Paul teaches us, *led by the Spirit of God.* By him they are kept from all fatal ignorance, and from every ruinous error.

4thly. *He corrects them.*

Of this necessary and benevolent parental office, St. Paul gives us a detailed account in the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. *My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, who corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather*

be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily, for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening seemeth for the present to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yielded the peaceful fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby.

In the account here given by the apostle concerning the correction of such as are adopted, summary as it is, we have a complete view of all that is most interesting in this subject. We are taught particularly, that correction is a distinctive privilege of God's children; that those, who are not corrected, are not his children; that we are always corrected with an intention to do us good, and not arbitrarilynor wantonly; that for this reason, as well as on account of the prerogatives and perfections of God, we are bound to receive our corrections with reverence, submission, patience, and fortitude; that the end for which we are corrected is, that we may be made *partakers of his holiness, and live;* and that if we receive our corrections in this manner, they will *yield us the peaceable fruits of righteousness,* and thus terminate in our immortal life.

The corrections which God administers to his children, are administered in the reproofs, alarms, and threatenings, of his word and ordinances, and the chastisements of his providence; and generally in all their distresses. By these they are checked in their downward progress of sense and sin: warned of approaching danger; quickened to more vigorous efforts in their duty; weaned from the world; and by degrees prepared for heaven.

5thly. *In the future world, he provides for them a glorious inheritance.*

Affectionate parents in the present world, not only prepare their children to live usefully, by giving them a proper education, but to live comfortably, by furnishing them, when it is in their power, with sufficient means of subsistence. God, in the same manner, takes a parental care of his own children, and provides the means of enabling them to live happily for ever. To this end, he regulates them perfectly holy; and thus furnishes them with dispositions, in possession of which they can live happily; dispositions, which

prepare them to be useful, amiable, honourable; esteemed and loved by all wise and good beings; particularly by himself; dispositions which ensure them peace of mind, self-approbation, and the consciousness of being excellent and lovely. To a mind thus purified and exalted, he unites a body spiritual, incorruptible, glorious, and immortal; the proper tenement of so noble an inhabitant. Thus formed and perfected he removes them to his heavenly kingdom, and there places them in circumstances and amid companions of such a nature, as to enable them to improve in knowledge, excellence, honour, and happiness, for ever.

SERMON LXXXIII.

CONSEQUENCES OF REGENERATION.

SANCTIFICATION.

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly.
1 THESS. v. 23.

HAVING considered, in the preceding discourse, *the nature, reality, importance,* and *consequences, of adoption,* I shall now proceed to the text subject of inquiry, in a theological system; viz. *sanctification.* That this is a consequence of regeneration, is too obvious to every one who reads his Bible to be questioned.

The word *sanctify,* used in the text, and elsewhere in the Scriptures abundantly, is employed to denote *two things,* which are commonly and properly made distinct objects of consideration in moral science: *the act of regenerating man,* or making him holy in the first instance; and, *the combination of all successive acts of a similar nature, by which man is improved in holiness through life.* It is scarcely necessary to be observed, that the latter of these subjects will now be the theme of investigation.

The text is a prayer of St. Paul for the sanctification of the Thessalonian Christians. As he prays, that they *may*

be wholly sanctified; it is evident, that they were sanctified in part only at their regeneration; and at the time also in which this prayer was uttered. It is farther evident, that they were to be sanctified in a still greater degree; because this event is prayed for by the apostle under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. The reality of this work is thus completely evident from the text; and is indeed so generally acknowledged by Christians, that it would be superfluous to attempt a proof of it at the present time. I shall, therefore, proceed directly to the consideration of this subject under the following heads:

I. *The agent;*

II. *The instruments;* and,

III. *The process; of sanctification.*

1. *The agent in our sanctification is the Spirit of God.*

This truth is amply declared in the Scriptures. *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit.* 2 Thess. ii. 13. *Elect,* says St. Peter, *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience.* 1 Pet. i. 2. *But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.* 1 Cor. vi. 14.

The most extensive and complete account, however, which is given us of this subject in the Scriptures, is contained in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Here Christians are said *not to walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit: to be under the law of the Spirit of life: to be after the Spirit: to mind the things of the Spirit: to be spiritually minded;* and thus to possess *life and peace: to have the Spirit dwelling in them; to be led by the Spirit;* which to them becomes *the spirit of adoption;* that is, *the spirit* by which they *are children of God, and cry unto him, Abba, Father: to have the witness of the Spirit: to have the first-fruits of the Spirit: to have the assistance of the Spirit in their prayers:* and, universally, to be under his guidance and influence through the whole Christian life.

The same agency indeed, like that which was exerted in the creation of the world, and like the divine agency generally considered, is attributed to the Godhead universally;

to the Father; and to the Son. The text is an example of the first of these forms of ascription. *The very God of peace sanctify you wholly!* Of the second we have an instance in the beginning of the Epistle of St. Jude. *Jude the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.* Of the last of these forms of ascription we have a specimen in 1 Cor. i. 30, *Jesus Christ, who unto us, of God, is become wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;* and another in Heb. ii. 11, *For both he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one: wherefore he is not ashamed to call them brethren.*

The reason why this work is thus differently ascribed, is, that it is considered in these canonical discourses in different manners, and with relation to different objects.

By the Father we are sanctified, as we are chosen by him unto sanctification; as by his good pleasure, and free grace, the atonement of Christ and the sanctifying agency of the Spirit, exist. *By the Son* we are sanctified, as his death is the only means by which we ever become holy: and by which the Spirit came into the world, for the benevolent purpose of making us holy. *By the Spirit* we are sanctified, as the immediate agent in applying to us the blessings of Christ's redemption; particularly in renewing and purifying our hearts and our lives.

Thus, although this work is immediately performed by the Spirit, as the proper agent; yet we are truly, though more remotely, said to be sanctified by the Father, by the Son, and by the Godhead, universally considered.

The manner in which this work is performed in the mind of man, must, like other questions concerning the agency of intelligent beings, remain in a great measure concealed from such minds as ours. My observations concerning it will, therefore, be very few. In my own view, the work of sanctification, so far as the agent is concerned, is no other than a repetition of the same agency by which we are regenerated. *Our regeneration,* according to my own apprehension, *is accomplished,* as I mentioned at large in a former discourse, *by the communication to our minds of a new relish for divine things. Our sanctification, as distinguished from it, consists, supremely, in enhancing this relish; in ren-*

dering it more intense, more uniform, more vigorous, and universally more operative. The communication of this relish, or disposition, makes us holy at first; or in our regeneration. Subsequent communications, of the same nature, render us more and more holy afterward. As the *effect*, in both cases, is the same; it cannot be reasonably doubted, that the *cause* is the same; nor that *it operates* in the same manner. If this disposition is, in the mind, the source of holy volitions and virtuous conduct; the stronger, the more prevalent, it is the succeeding period, the more virtuous will be the life.

II. *The instruments of our sanctification are generally the word and providence of God.*

The word of God is the means of our sanctification in all cases in which it contributes to render us better; whether it be read, heard, or remembered; whether it be pondered with love, reverence, wonder, and delight; or whether, with similar affections, it be faithfully obeyed; whether its instructions and impressions be communicated to us directly, or through the medium of divine ordinances, or the conversation, or the communion, or the example, of our fellow-Christians. In all these cases, the thing which is seen, which is illustrated, which is exemplified, which is in any manner brought home to the heart, and thus rendered the means of improving us in virtue, is no other than the word of God; however numerous, however diversified, the modes are, in which it is presented to the mind.

As the word of God is loved by a regenerated mind; it is easily discernible, that its influence on such a mind will be very different from that which existed in the preceding state, commonly termed the state of nature.

Particularly, the Scriptures will be more frequently and extensively read. A book, which we love, is often taken up; is often perused, and dwelt upon, with pleasure. Such a book, therefore, will be much more thoroughly studied, and extensively understood, than one which is disrelished. It is, also, now more highly reverenced; and for this reason will be more read, and better known.

Its instructions and precepts, at the same time, coincide with the great scheme of moral conduct formed by the

mind; as its only general directory; harmonizing with its views, affections, aims, and determinations. They are therefore welcomed as means of light; as objects of complacency: as sanctions of favourite designs; and as guides, aids, and motives, to a life chosen and loved.

The Scriptures are also regarded by such a mind, as being, in a proper sense, *the word of God;* of him, by whom itself was created; under whose law and government it is placed; to whom all its duty is originally owed; and to whom it is, of course, answerable for all its conduct. Thus considered, the Scriptures appear, to such a mind, invested with infinite authority, conveying supreme obligation, and rightfully controlling the heart and the life. With an efficacy still more peculiar are they regarded as the word of the Father, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier, of man: as the word of a forgiving God; of a Redeemer, dying for its own sins; of that infinitely benevolent Spirit, who is its own Sanctifier. Under these titles the most venerable and the most endearing which the universe has ever known, God speaks in his word to every Christian with a power which nothing can equal, with a tenderness and endearment to which there is no parallel. Whatever he utters, is not the prescription of a perfect creator and lawgiver only; but the counsel and pleasure also of *a father, and an everlasting friend:* infinitely the most faithful and useful of all friends; infinitely the most venerable and affectionate of all parents. From such a source what counsel, what command, what persuasion, will not completely influence and control the heart of filial piety?

Finally, the Scriptures are regarded by such a mind, as *containing all things* necessary *to life and to godliness.* The precepts are an ample summary of all the directions necessary for our practice; the ordinances for our worship; and the instructions for our faith, and the prudent conduct of our religious life. The mind resorts to them, therefore, as to a complete compend of all the directions which it needs, or ever can need, in the present world. Every thing which it contains is right; is sufficient; is decisive. To every thing it yields, therefore, with implicit confidence; and, whatever may be the rules which it finds here, is satisfied, and safe.

The providence of God becomes the means of our sanctification in all the ways in which it makes solemn and religious impressions on the mind. The great, majestic, and awful events, which take place in the creation around us, excite strongly *admiration* and *reverence* towards that glorious Being, who holds the universe in his hands, and controls all its beings and events with such amazing power and wisdom. The order and harmony with which all things move to their proper ends; the succession of *summer and winter, seed-time and harvest;* and the *terrible things* which God *does in righteousness when his judgments are abroad in the earth;* awaken in the soul of the Christian most affecting views of the divine government; of its vastness; its comprehensiveness; its astonishing grandeur; and its unvarying opposition to iniquity.

The dispensations of God to his church are a most impressive source of religious thoughts and affections to the Christian. These are all dispensations involving the peculiar interests of his own brethren; his chosen friends; with whom he ever *weeps when they weep, and rejoices when they rejoice.* These display also, in a manner wholly peculiar, and, although often obscure, mysterious, and even perplexing, yet, if it be not his own fault, always interesting and profitable, the most venerable and endearing attributes of his heavenly Father. Every Christian will easily recollect, that, in the history of God's providence towards the disciples of Christ, in their sufferings and deliverances, their exposure and protection, the communications made to them of grace, mercy, and peace, their consequent exemplary faith, their hope and joy, their victory and triumph, their edifying life, and their peaceful death, he has found means of improvement, alway touching his heart, and contributing in an eminent degree to amend his life. Here he has found his doubts and fears, his stupidity and sloth, his murmurings and backslidings, most efficaciously reproved; his faith and fortitude, his reverence and submission, his hope, and love, and joy, unusually strengthened. From accounts of these things he has risen to more fervent prayers, more ardent praises, more vigorous resolutions, and more faithful obedience. What is true of these things, existing in other times and other countries, is equally true of the

same things, as they respect the Christians around him. Here the events are brought before his eyes; and are presented to him with the force possessed only by the immediate objects of sense. The truth here may be no more satisfactorily exhibited; but the impression made by it is necessarily enhanced. A deeper interest is therefore naturally felt; more lasting traces are impressed on the memory; and a more powerful influence is diffused over the life. All the happy effects derived from the preceding source, flow therefore from this with a more intense and controlling efficacy.

But, above all, the dispensations of God to himself, and to his family, are the most strongly realized, and most regularly directed to his own spiritual improvement, by the renewed man. These are all more perfectly understood; come more immediately to the heart; and operate with a more commanding influence on the life. In these he is taught by the finger of God, as a child trained to his service, and fitted by degrees for eternal glory. *Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.*

It will be remembered, that to both these sources of improvement in the divine life, the heart of the Christian is opened by the disposition which he receives in regeneration. It will be remembered, that he regards them all with a taste, a relish, congenial to them; that he beholds them with enlightened eyes; that he applies himself to them with unceasing diligence; that he considers this application to them as his indispensable duty, and his pre-eminent interest. All of them therefore operate upon his understanding, affections, and life, in a manner unknown by other men: and, where sinners would experience nothing but dulness, distrust, murmuring, and opposition, he cannot fail to find, for these reasons, the most efficacious means of rendering him wiser, and better, and happier.

III. *The process of sanctification may be summarily exhibited in the following manner.*

1st. *It is progressive through life.*

The first sanctifying act of the Spirit of God is employed in *regenerating* the soul. Succeeding acts, of the same na-

ture, are employed in *purifying* it, through all the successive periods of life. All these acts are, I apprehend, of exactly the same nature, and differ from each other in no other respect, except that the *regenerating act is first*, and *the sanctifying acts*, as they are termed, *are successive to it*. All united constitute that, which in the Scriptures, and often in the common use of language, is called *the work of sanctification*. But as there is frequent occasion to distinguish the first act from the others, we customarily term *this the renewing, or regenerating act*: and sometimes *regeneration*, and *renovation*; and denote *the succeeding acts* by the words *sanctifying*, and *sanctification*. All however are, in my view, exactly of the same nature. The *agent* is the same: his *agency* is the same: and the *effects* are the same. The reason why the first act is thus distinguished is, that the change from sin to holiness is an event so remarkable, so wonderful, so new in the providence of God. The future changes from one degree of holiness to another, although really wonderful, are less so; and less contrary to rational hope. They are therefore grouped together in the Scriptures, and in common language, under the one general name of sanctification. These acts, as I have observed, continue through life. Under the influence of them, and with the aid of those means which are appointed for this purpose in the divine government, the Christian *grows in wisdom, and in grace*, to the end.

To aim at this progress is accordingly made the duty, and described as the character, of a good man, throughout the Scriptures. *This one thing I do*, saith St. Paul, *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* Phil. iii. 13. *Beware*, says St. Peter, *lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* 2 Pet. iii. 18. *Besides this*, says the same apostle, *giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if ye do these things ye shall never fall.* 2 Pet. i. 5—7. 10.

2dly. *This process is not uniform.*

By this I intend, that it is not the same in manner, or degree, every day, month, or year. In the religious life of St. Paul, as we are informed, *the law of the members* prevailed at times; and at times, *the law of the mind.* In that of David, and that of Hezekiah, as well as in that of Solomon, sin, at particular seasons, appears evidently to have triumphed throughout considerable periods.

When we remember the nature and circumstances of men, this fact will be far from appearing wonderful. The nature of man is in many respects various. From whatever cause it arises, our views are at times brighter, our vigilance more active, our resolution stronger, our temper more serene, and our energy more vigorous, than at other times. This is visible in all that we speak, or think, or do, whatever may be the objects of our attention. That a state of things in us, which so materially affects ourselves in our very nature, should have an important influence on our religious interests, is to be expected of course. The changes are here wrought in ourselves; and *we*, the persons thus changed, are those whose religion is concerned. As *we* are changed, therefore, the state of our religion must, in a greater or less degree, be changed also. When our minds are bright, and prepared to take bright views of any subject of contemplation; their views of religion will naturally be bright. When our affections are in a general state of ardour; our love to divine things will naturally be vigorous, as well as our hatred to sin and temptation. When our resolution is generally firm; we shall naturally be *steadfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord.* On the contrary, when our apprehension is dull and heavy, our spirits low, and our resolution timid and wavering: all our efforts will be poor and feeble, and in a great measure fruitless. Our views will be obscure; our affections will lag; and our progress will either not exist at all, or be slow, heavy, and discouraging.

Sometimes, also, we are beset by more numerous and more powerful temptations. Snares are set for us with greater art and secrecy. Sophistry, more plausible and seducing, is employed to warp our principles, affections, and conduct. Obstacles, apparently insurmountable, block

up our way. Discouragements, terrifying, and at seasons overwhelming, daunt our resolution. The inducements to backsliding come upon us suddenly; find us off our guard; and overpower us, before we summon either our understanding or our principles to our aid.

At the same time, our advantages for improvement in the Christian life, are at some times far less and less productive of safety and improvement, than at others. Our peculiar and most useful friends, those who best understand our character, wants, and dangers, are sometimes removed from us to such a distance, that we cannot enjoy their counsels, reproofs, consolations, or example. We are prevented from uniting with them in the public or private ordinances of the gospel; and are deprived of the peculiar blessings of intimate Christian communion.

At times also we are peculiarly unfaithful to ourselves, and to God; are less watchful; less prayful; less strenuous in our opposition to temptation, and in the performance of our duty. The world lays stronger hold on our affections. We venture on forbidden ground; draw near to the objects of seduction: become fascinated with charms before undiscovered, and overpowered by combinations of harmony, fragrance, beauty, and splendour, of sprightliness, gaiety, and joy; or alarmed by an assemblage of enemies, dangers, and terrors, of contempt, shame, and ridicule; so as to be *enticed* to sin on the one hand, and *terrified* into it on the other.

At other periods, most of these things are reversed. Time, at these seasons, rolls on to us with brighter mornings, with more unclouded days, with more serene evenings; and nights with more undisturbed tranquillity and peaceful repose. At such seasons our views of all divine subjects are clearer, and more just. Our affections are more alive; our aims more noble, unmixed, and heavenly; our resolution more vigorous and uniform; our conduct more approved in its progress, and followed in review by pure peace and self-approbation. God, also, for reasons wholly unknown to us, or imperfectly comprehended by us, sometimes withdraws the light of his countenance, and the blessings of his Spirit; sometimes communicates these and other blessings more uniformly and abundantly; and generally regulates

his providence towards us in such a manner, that we are greatly improved and prospered in some instances; and in others, are afflicted, brought to a stand, or suffered to decline.

But with all these inequalities in the course of the Christian, his holiness, like *the house of David, waxes stronger and stronger;* and his corruption, like *the house of Saul, becomes weaker and weaker.*

3dly. *The process of sanctification is universal.*

By this I intend that *it affects the whole man:* his views, affections, purposes, and conduct; and those of every kind. It extends alike to his duties of every kind: towards himself, his fellow-creatures, and his Maker. It affects and improves, indiscriminately, all the virtues of the Christian character: love to God and to mankind; faith, repentance, justice, truth, kindness, humility, forgiveness, charity, generosity, public spirit, meekness, patience, fortitude, temperance, moderation, candour, and charitableness of judgment. It influences ruling passions and appetites; habits of thought and affection, of language and practice. It prompts to all the acts of piety: to prayer, praise, attendance upon the sanctuary and its ordinances, our sanctification of the sabbath, Christian communion, and Christian discipline.

Generally it affects every part of the Christian's character and life; and all it affects with continual advantage. Yet, as has been already remarked, the operation is not uniform. All the Christian virtues increase, yet they do not all increase alike: nor does any one of them increase in the same manner at all times. In the Scriptures, the improvement of the mind in the Christian character is, with great beauty and correctness, compared to the growth of children. Children grow from their birth; and may be truly said to be always growing: yet the increase is not always alike, nor always visible. They grow also in every part of their frame; increasing upon the whole, both in size and stature, throughout all the members. Yet at some times, and in some of the members, they cannot be seen to grow at all; while at other times and in other members, the increase is rapid, and easily discernible. The means of growth also are very various, and variously operative. From day to day, from week to week,

and sometimes from year to year, the progress cannot be perceived. And in some instances one part is found to increase, another to be at a stand, or even to diminish; and thus the symmetry, proportion, and beauty, of the frame to be sensibly injured. In all these particulars, the parallel between the growth of Christians and the growth of children is exact.

4thly. *The progress of sanctification is conspicuous in the life.*

From the commencement of Christianity in the soul, the Christian course is that of *a general reformation*. The religion that *brings* not *forth fruit meet for repentance*, is not the religion of the Scriptures. It is not the beginning of spiritual life. It is not the beginning of immortal life. The virtue of the gospel is a living principle producing every good fruit; rendering the man wiser, and his life and conversation better, unto the end. The natural passions and appetites of some Christians are indeed strong; and their evil habits, antecedently to regeneration, have become powerful. The temptations of others are peculiarly great; and they labour under peculiar disadvanages for resisting them, as well as for making progress in the Christian life.

As the work of sanctification itself proceeds, according to the exhibition which I have made of this subject, in irregular and very various gradations; so the external fruits of it, seen in the life of the Christian, are subject to the same gradations. *The wind bloweth*, not only *where*, but in what manner, *it listeth*; and no particular description can be satisfactorily given of its progress.

The varieties of this work, which I have all along referred to the life of a single person, become far more numerous and diversified when referred to Christians in general. Here, both the original and incidental differences are multiplied almost without end; and it is impossible to mention even a small part of them in the compass of a single discourse. Still the same general doctrines are applicable and useful to all Christians; because all have a common nature, and a common interest.

REMARKS.

1st. *The considerations suggested concerning this impor-*

tant religious subject, furnish every professing Christian with an interesting rule for the examination of his own character.

It has been here exhibited as the true process of sanctification, that this work is carried on through the whole of human life; as the continual though not uniform state of the Christian character, to be advancing under the influence of the divine Spirit, *towards the stature of the perfect man.* With this scheme in view, it becomes every professor of religion faithfully to inquire, whether he perceives in his own mind such a progress. It will readily be seen that Christians, who have lately become such, must have fewer and more imperfect means of making this inquiry, and determining the point satisfactorily, than those who are farther advanced. The longer children have been growing, the more perceivable will be the change of their stature. The longer Christians have been Christians, the greater advances in religion will they have had opportunity to make. The child may have grown in reality through a short period; while yet his growth is incapable of being perceived. The young Christian may, in like manner, find less proof of his advancement; or doubtful proof; or even no proof at all; and yet have no sufficient reason for discouragement. Still he ought to make the inquiry; and to make it with persevering diligence. If he be faithful in this duty, he will, in all probability, and at no great distance of time, find comforting evidence of his growth in grace; and usually the sooner, the more faithful he is in pursuing this examination.

The professor, who has longer declared his devotion to God, is bound still more earnestly to make this inquiry. *One* at least of the best proofs which can be furnished, of the existence of grace in the soul, is *evidence of its growth;* and one of which we ought never to lose sight even for a day. If we go on from month to month, and from year to year, without any improvement in the Christian life; our case must be dark and distressing indeed. Much more distressing must it be, if instead of advancing, we sensibly decline. Christians may and will fall into temptation and sin; and sometimes into sins which are great, and peculiarly dreadful. Thus did David; thus did Solomon; thus did Peter. These are fearful grounds of humiliation and sor-

row; but even these, when followed by contrition and amendment, are far less discouraging and hopeless, than that slow regular decline, that chilled perishing state, which admits of no intervenings of warmth, no returns of health and vigour. The pleurisy or the gout may kill; and *often* greatly alarm and endanger; but they frequently, nay, most usually, terminate their violence speedily, and give place to returning strength. The consumption on the other hand, although its attacks are gentle, gradual, and scarcely perceivable, insinuates itself with a fatal progress into the constitution; and, if not exterminated in season, regularly ends in death. I will not say, that a hectic in religion is hopeless; but it must be allowed, on all hands, to be terrible. Let it be observed in this place, however, that Christians sometimes are really advancing when they do not perceive it; and when their progress, although hidden from themselves, is visible to those around them. This, together with other mysteries, God will unfold hereafter; and will shew them that the dispensation has been the means of his glory, and of their own final good. All Christians ought to learn from this fact, to consult their fellow-Christians, as well as themselves, on this great subject; and not to depend entirely on their own investigation.

If, on the other hand, professors of religion find themselves advancing in faith, repentance, and holiness; if God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is more and more an object of delightful contemplation to their minds; if they take more and more delight in prayer and praise, in the sabbath, the sanctuary, and their ordinances; if the word of God seems more and more preferable *to the most fine gold;* if they love more and more *to do good unto all men;* if they find an increasing delight in the character, company, conversation, and prosperity, of their fellow-Christians: then they may, indeed, *sing of mercy;* and enjoy a lively hope, that they are fast overcoming the world, and preparing for the glories of the heavenly kingdom.

2dly. *The same considerations furnish abundant encouragement to the Christian.*

Think how much God has done to accomplish this work; and you can find no room for despondency. I will know,

I readily confess, how prone all men are to yield to temptations; to love the world; to indulge appetite and passion; to embrace error; to cherish self-justification; to find ways of sinning, which in their own eyes are safe and blameless; to reconcile and unite virtues to their counterfeit vices; and thus, in a great variety of modes, to backslide, and sin, and fall. How hopeless, with these things in our view, would seem final, persevering holiness, and a safe arrival in the heavenly kingdom!

But the agency of the Spirit of God, in our sanctification, puts all these terrible evils to flight; and assures us, that *he who hath begun a good work in us, will perform it unto the day of Christ.* He is every where present to every Christian; knows every want and danger; and is ever ready to do all that is necessary and useful for the followers of Christ. No evil can escape his eye; no enemy resist or elude his power. With infinite benignity and tenderness he dwells within and without us, to guard, relieve, heal, sanctify, and save; to give us strength to endure, and power to overcome. Under his influence and direction, we shall successfully *fight the good fight, keep the faith, finish our course with joy, and receive that crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to all them that love his appearing. Thanks be to God for* this *unspeakable gift.* Amen.

SERMON LXXXIV.

CONSEQUENCES OF REGENERATION.

PEACE OF CONSCIENCE.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.—JOHN XIV. 27.

HAVING examined the nature of *adoption* and *sanctification*, I shall now proceed to consider another consequence of this change in man; viz. *evangelical peace*.

These words are a part of Christ's first discourse to his apostles, after the institution of the Lord's supper. He was now about to leave the world. His death he had often predicted to them in the plainest language: yet so strong were their expectations of a reigning, conquering Messiah, that they seem never to have believed these predictions. So far as they were able, they appear to have interpreted them in any manner, rather than the true one; and, when they could not misinterpret them, to have concluded that they involved some mystery which it was beyond their power to unriddle.

However, as the time drew near, and the events which led to this great one began to thicken, they became apprehensive and alarmed. What evils were before them they seem not to have realized; but they appear to have been fully sensible that something terrible was at hand, and to have become deeply discouraged by loose and undefined forebodings.

Christ understood perfectly the state of their minds; and, with his own peculiar tenderness, commenced the benevolent work of furnishing them the necessary relief. This he accomplished in three discourses: the first included in this, the second in the two following, and the third in the seventeenth, chapters. Never were consolations so well devised, or so well administered. The discourses are beautiful beyond all parallel, supremely instructive, exquisitely tender, and replete with considerations of the most supporting na-

ture. The last of them is a *prayer;* more interesting, more sublime, more wonderful, than ever was or ever will be uttered in the present world; and may fairly be regarded as a specimen of that intercession which the divine Advocate makes for his followers *before the throne of the* MAJESTY *in the heavens.*

Among the considerations which endear these discourses of Christ to his children, the most affecting one is, *they are his dying words;* his last addresses before he ascended the cross. They succeeded the institution of the sacramental supper, they preceded the crucifixion. Never was there an occasion so interesting, so solemn, so divine; nor was any mind, beside that of Christ, ever so perfectly fitted to understand and feel the nature of this occasion, or so able to employ it to the best of all purposes. He seems here to have poured out his soul with supreme love and infinite endearment. The whole Saviour is brought out to view, the God becomes visible in his most lovely and glorious character.

The apostles were now to be left by him; to go, unbefriended and unprotected, into a world of enemies; and to meet all the evils which could be inflicted on them by bigotry, malice, and persecution. To support them in this state of suffering, he promises them a rich variety of blessings; particularly the presence and everlasting love of his Father and himself; reminds them of his own sufferings, and of the fortitude with which he had endured them, and assures to them the consolation of the Spirit of truth, as a most desirable and delightful support under all external distresses.

Of all the blessings contained in these promises, none seems to be better suited to their situation and their wants, that that which is announced in the text. When contentions multiply, and enemies invade, from without; when friends withdraw, and comforts diminish; when enjoyments lessen, and hope retires; nothing can be more timely, more desirable, more welcome, than peace within; peace, quieting all the tumults of the mind, soothing the wounds of a troubled conscience, and allaying, on the one hand fear, on the other suffering.

That we may understand the value of this legacy, left by

the Redeemer, not to the apostles only, but to all his followers, it will be useful to consider,

I. *The nature of the peace which he gave;* and,

II. *The manner in which he gave it.*

I. *I will endeavour to explain the nature of the peace which Christ gave his disciples.*

Peace is always opposed to war, and when begun in any instance, involves the cessation of the preceding conflict. With a direct reference to such a conflict Christ was pleased to bestow the blessing mentioned in the text, and called it by a name, fitted to shew both the nature of the evils to be remedied, and the nature of the remedy.

Such a conflict actually exists between man *and himself; his fellow-men; and his Maker. Against God* this hostility manifests itself in ten thousand acts of resistance to his pleasure. While *he* claims the supreme love and implicit obedience of every intelligent creature, man denies both his claims and the rights on which they are founded; and boldly sets up, in opposition to them, claims and rights of his own, which he determines to support to the utmost of his power. For this end he commences a progress of revolt and contention, which occupies most of his time and most of his thoughts; and at death, leaves, not unfrequently, the controversy undecided.

With his fellow-men his contention arises from two sources: *his own* selfishness, *and theirs.* The mind in which selfishness reigns, always wishes, intends, and labours, to make every other interest subservient to its own; or, at the least, to prevent it from disturbing, precluding, or diminishing, its own. From this source have sprung all the private and all the public contentions, which have destroyed the peace of neighbourhoods, and ravaged the world; the sufferings and the sighs, the tears and the groans, which have spread from one end of heaven to the other.

Nor is man less busily employed in conflicting *with himself.* The passions and appetites of the human heart have ever opposed the dictates of conscience. The conscience was intended by God to regulate the moral conduct of the man; and strenuously and firmly asserts its right to this in-

portant and most necessary control. Still more strenuously the passions rebel against it, force the man to submit to their own dictates, and hurry him into a course of disobedience. In this progress of guilt, conscience holds out her dreadful mirror to his terrified eye; exhibits him to himself, odious, deformed, and fearfully exposed to the anger of God.

To this distracted miserable being, peace is announced in the text, by him who knew all the wants, sufferings, and dangers, of our race. Upon a strict examination, the legacy will be found to be exactly suited to the state of those for whom it was intended.

1st. *It is a happy state of the mind or intellect.*

Every person who has at all entertained serious and solemn thoughts concerning religious subjects, must have often perceived a multitude of doubts, springing up in his mind at different times, concerning the word of God; the evidence by which its divine origin is evinced; and the nature of the doctrines and precepts which it contains. These doubts may at times grow out of ignorance; usually they spring from the heart; from its disrelish to the truth itself, and its opposition to its Author. Every doubt on this subject is attended with some degree of distress. The soul is unwilling that there should be any such truths; and that God should have such a character as to be capable of being the author of them. Especially is this observation applicable to those doctrines which exhibit ourselves as guilty, condemned, and ruined; and God as pure, holy, and sovereign. Against these doctrines mankind have contended in all ages, have doubted their truth, have denied their import, and have exploded the evidence by which they were sustained. In the place of these doctrines the mind substitutes others which are more palatable to itself. For their obvious and real meaning, which it is determined not to admit, it substitutes others; kindred perhaps, and plausible, but oblique, and incapable of being supported. In this manner it struggles to get loose from the truth of God; sometimes by believing that he has made no revelation of his will to mankind; sometimes by determining that he has made no such revelation as is commonly received: and generally, by adopting a creed essentially different from

that which is contained in the Scriptures. Every part of this creed it makes more pleasing to itself, less terrifying, less humiliating, and yet, as it hopes, equally safe.

Still, revelation, in spite of all those labours and struggles, continues to be supported by no small evidence. The *obvious* meaning of the doctrines which it contains, will, at times, appear but too probably the *true* meaning. In spite of the mind itself, its arguments, and persuasions, God may, and, it frequently fears, will, be found to be just such a being, as he seems to be exhibited in the Scriptures. Its own character, also, it almost daily suspects (and conscience perpetually enhances the suspicion), is just such as the Scriptures have declared; and its danger neither less real, nor less terrible. Thus the soul becomes *a troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.*

Nor is either this opposition, or the distress which springs from it, less excited by the tenor of the scriptural *precepts*, than by that of the *doctrines*. In the view of such a mind, the precepts appear to be unnecessarily numerous, nice, and rigid; enjoining many things which it thinks might better have been omitted; and prohibiting many things, which, it conceives, would have been much better allowed. The life which they require, it pronounces to be unnecessarily strict, difficult, and discouraging; and regards as being of a gloomy and melancholy nature. Hence it supposes, and at times believes, that God cannot have intended, that his precepts should be understood in their obvious meaning; and that some other meaning, attended with many softenings, and involving many limitations, is to be attributed to them; or that, at the worst, a partial, imperfect obedience to them will ultimately be accepted.

Under the influence of these wishes, and the views to which they give birth, accompanied by fears that the things thus opposed may all be the real pleasure of God, the views erroneous, and the wishes sinful; such a mind wearies itself to find out a more palatable moral system; is harassed by suspense, and distressed by painful apprehensions.

But when the hostility of the heart towards its Maker, and towards his truth, is dissolved by the mild influence of the Spirit of grace; and the soul is indued with love to its

Maker; the character of God, and the doctrines and precepts of his word, are seen with new optics; and appear, therefore, in a new light. It is the nature of evangelical love to delight alike in the truth and its AUTHOR. Both are thenceforth seen with the eyes of good-will. Of course, God appears to the mind, invested with his proper character and supreme glory; as the sum of all excellence; as infinitely great, and wise, and good. It is seen to be impossible for him to deceive, or to be deceived. Whatever he declares is, therefore, admitted without reserve. The divine origin of the Scriptures is readily believed, because the evidence which supports it is such as to satisfy any candid mind; and because the mind in question has now become possessed of real candour. The true and obvious meaning of the doctrines and precepts, wherever it is seen, is readily received, because it is relished, and because God is believed to have made his precepts *plain to him that understandeth*, or, in other words, is possessed of piety. The things to be believed, the mind now loves to believe. The things required, it now chooses to do. The nature of the doctrines, and the reasons on which the precepts are founded, it will, indeed, at times be unable to unravel. But here its faith and obedience will be implicit; because it knows, that God does not prescribe without the best reasons, and that his instructions, however mysterious, must be always true, and always desirable. What it understands, it welcomes. What it does not understand, it receives with an humble submission to him who has said, *The secret things belong to God; but the things that are revealed belong to men.*

From such a mind, it is easy to see, suspense and perplexity must vanish of course; together with all the agitation, fear, and pain, with which they were attended. The weapons of its warfare have been laid down; its toils are ended; its alarms are over; its struggles are relinquished; and a delightful repose has succeeded to its multiplied, long-continued, and painful efforts; a repose doubly delightful; in its own nature; and as a charming contrast to the various troubles by which it has been so often and so deeply distressed.

2dly. *It is a happy state of the affections.*

It has been already sufficiently indicated, that the affections are originally alienated from God, and opposed to his government and pleasure. The spirit of apostacy is, primarily, a spirit of pride and self-dependance; which always exalts itself against its Maker. The angels who fell, fell by refusing to *keep their first estate;* την ἑαυτων αρχην: *their own office,* or *principality;* and by *deserting* (απολ ποντας) *their habitation;* οικητηριον, *their station.* They refused to continue even in that exalted rank of existence, and to execute the duties of that high station, assigned to them by the goodness of God. The same spirit predominates in fallen men. *They* too are dissatisfied with their own station and their own duties. All apostate beings say to God in their hearts, *We will not have thee to reign over us.*

Equally hostile to the divine government is *the lust of the flesh;* sensuality; *and the lust of the eyes;* avarice. Concerning these three great controlling affections of the human mind, it is alike true, that *they are not of the Father but of the world;* and that wherever they reign, *the love of the Father* cannot exist.

From the indulgence of this spirit, continually spring up in the soul haughty claims upon its Maker for the increase of its enjoyments, and an exemption from its duties: claims which God never satisfies, unless in the way of judgment and indignation. The soul, therefore, is discontented with its allotments; questions his wisdom, goodness, and truth; murmurs against his providence; refuses to perform its own duty; and thus carries on a continual, ardent, painful, conflict with its Maker.

A controversy with such a being as God, cannot fail of being attended with perpetual anxiety and alarm. He who is the subject of it, dreads the presence of God; is terrified by all the threatenings of his word; trembles at the approach of death; shrinks from the judgment; and looks towards a future retribution with horror.

Of these evils there is but one possible termination; and that is submission to God. Whenever this is accomplished in earnest, they dissolve, like an enchantment in Arabian tales. The Creator, before dreaded and hated, is changed at once, to the view of the soul, into an affectionate parent, reverenced, loved, and delightfully obeyed. This awful

enemy becomes instantaneously an everlasting and almighty friend; this hard master, a divine and boundless benefactor. His character is then contemplated with awe indeed, but with delight also. His *commandments*, no longer *grievous*, are preferred to *thousands of gold and of silver*. His presence, no longer terrible, is continually coveted; and communion with him in prayer and praise, is daily sought and delightfully found.

In this manner the affections become serene, cheerful, and pleasant. The storm subsides into a calm; and the darkness of the soul is illumined with a perpetual sunshine.

3dly. *It is a happy state of the conscience.*

When the affections have thus bowed to their Creator: when the soul has sincerely said, *Thy will be done;* conscience, unopposed and undisturbed, dictates whatever is to be done; and smiles its approbation, whenever it is performed. In the various retrospects which the Christian takes of his progress at the end of a day, a week, a month, or a year, he is enabled to look on, and approve; and to feel a supporting hope, that he is approved, in some good measure, by his God. His thoughts, affections, and designs, cease to be objects of dread; and self-examination to be a duty which he cannot perform. To himself he is no longer a stranger. Prayer he no longer dreads. From his moral character he no longer shrinks. At his future destiny he ceases to shudder. A daily, welcome cheerful visitor at the internal fireside, he finds there nothing but peace, harmony, and pleasure.

4thly. *It is a happy state of the life.*

In a world like this, it will not be imagined, that external peace can be perfect. Although the man in question is possessed of a peaceful spirit only, yet in those around him he will not always find the same disposition. In *him* there is no cause of hostility; but in *them* it will not of course be extinguished. While he is surrounded by beings of this description therefore, he cannot expect undisturbed peace. Yet amid the discord and violence of this world, his moderation, his kindness, will either allay, or quietly and firmly endure, the storm. Men of candid dispositions, beholding his conduct, will approve and commend; and men of prejudice and passion will often be overcome, and desist from their persecution.

Yet even here he will find many persons of a character kindred to his own. Of the approbation, the love, and the kind offices, of these men, he is assured. The esteem of wisdom and worth is invaluable; is accompanied by sincere love; is followed by a perpetual train of kind offices; and is therefore an ample compensation for the contempt, hatred, and obloquy, of all the unreasonable and unworthy. Should he meet, then, with many troubles from men of this character; he will still find a rich enjoyment from the approbation and good-will of the wise and virtuous; *a table* of rich viands, *spread* before him *in the presence of his enemies; a cup running over* with blessings.

At the same time he is still more refreshed and comforted by a sense of the approbation of God. An humble hope of forgiveness is accompanied, of course, by a hope of the divine complacency. The *favour* of God, even in this world, *is life*, and *his loving kindness better than life*. A disposition to obey this great and glorious being is always delightful; and his *law sweeter* to an evangelical taste *than honey, and the honeycomb*. Although men therefore, although all men, should rise up in hostility against him; he would say with David, *The Lord is on my side, I will not fear. What can man do unto me? I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved. The Lord God is* his *shield:* he cannot fail therefore of being safe. The *Lord God is* his *sun:* his life will therefore be cheered with the light of heaven.

II. *The manner in which this legacy is given, is taught in those remarkable words of our Saviour, Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.*

The world gives with an intention to gain at least as much as it gave; and thus gives for its own benefit, not for ours. The world gives by halves; and often resumes what it has given. The world gives grudgingly; with a meanness which embitters the boon to those who receive it. The world gives in pretence, and not in reality; its gifts being, at best, of little value, and of momentary duration. Finally, the world reproaches us, as being deeply indebted for its largesses, and imperiously demands servile acknowledgments, and base compliances, as a proper return for the obligations which it has conferred.

Christ, on the contrary, gives with perfect liberality, and unlimited bounty; cheerfully, never resuming what he has given; for our benefit only: really, and not in pretence; with absolute sincerity, and supreme nobleness of disposition. His gifts also, while they are of high value in themselves, endure for ever. At the same time he never reproaches us on account of his blessings; and demands of us no unworthy sacrifices.

REMARKS.

From these observations we learn,

1st. *How to estimate this legacy of Christ.*

To a being in the situation of man, as described in the former part of this discourse, such a gift is plainly and pre-eminently necessary. Condemned, loathed, and afflicted, by his Maker, he has no friend to whom he may betake himself for consolation, and no refuge to which he may fly for safety. Whatever he does, God is present to see, and to retribute. An enemy here, he is an enemy every where; an enemy, from whom there is no concealment, defence, nor escape. Still the circumstances of the unhappy man would be less dreadful, if he could find peace and support within. But, there, conscience arms herself against him: while his rebellious passions bring their pain in hand, and are frequently followed by remorse and despair. When he looks abroad, he sees his fellow-creatures at war with him also; and from them seeks in vain for an alleviation of his sufferings.

In this situation Christ proclaims to him peace with God, with mankind, and with himself; *peace passing all understanding;* peace which *the world can neither give nor take away.* Henceforth, nothing is desirable in his sight, but that which God chooses; nothing lovely, but that which God loves. To know the divine will is, in his view, to know all that is necessary; and to obey it, all that is useful. He is assured of the divine protection, and is therefore safe: for he knows, that no enemy can endanger his welfare, or disturb his repose.

In the mean time, *his soul* has *returned to its rest,* and is quiet. The storm is past; and is succeeded by serenity and sunshine. If he finds enemies abroad, he disarms

half their rage by his own meekness: the rest he sustains, pities, and forgives.

In times of danger, when God comes out against mankind, to *judge the world in righteousness*, he enjoys the unspeakable consolation of believing, that this awful Being is a friend to *him*. When therefore the tempest rages, the famine desolates, or the pestilence hurries its victims to the grave; *when a thousand fall at his side, and ten thousand at his right hand; it shall not come near* HIM.

Afflictions will, however, reach even *him*. It is necessary, that he should be chastened: and *chastening* in its very nature *is grievous*. But, for this grief the peace of the gospel provides a sure and delightful alleviation. The pain, he knows, is inflicted by the *Father of his spirit; that he may become a partaker of his holiness, and live*. He receives it therefore with patience and resignation; and thus strips disease of its languor; robs pain of its sting; lights up a cheering lamp in the dark chambers of sorrow.

In death, that melancholy and distressing day to the wicked, his eye penetrates the gloom, and descries the glorious morning which dawns beyond it. On the other side of this narrow, gloomy valley, spreads a world of peace; where no storm ever blows; no enemy ever invades; and no danger ever threatens. There all are friends. God is his friend: Christ is his friend: and none but his friends are found among *the innumerable company of angels*, or *the general assembly of the first-born*.

2dly. *How greatly is this blessing enhanced by the consideration, that Christ has given us* HIS OWN PEACE.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. In this declaration we are reminded of the glorious character of *him* who bestows the legacy, and of the wonderful things which he has done to procure it for *us*. Christ is divinely great and excellent; and the gift is suited to his character; is excellent, noble, and divine. It is the rich fruit, the genuine evidence, of virtue: a seal, impressed by the Saviour on the soul, as unquestionable proof that it has become his: a living witness, that he has there taken up his residence, as in a temple, in which he is pleased to dwell. It is his *still, small voice*, whispering its delightful accents

that he is there; and that he is there, on his own most benevolent purpose of purifying it for heaven, and quickening it with immortal life. The giver is divine; the gift is divine: the end for which it is given is also divine.

The things which he has done and suffered to procure this gift for man, are infinitely great and endearing. For this end when he was *in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God; he made himself of no reputation; was made in the likeness of men; and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* In the peace which Christians enjoy, they are presented with a perpetual memorial of these wonderful efforts of him, *who* thus *in his flesh abolished the enmity; and made, preached, and became, peace to them who were afar off, and to them who were nigh.* Whenever this delightful serenity of soul is enjoyed by us, we cannot easily avoid recollecting, that with boundless benignity the Son of God became man; lived a life of unceasing humiliation and suffering; died on the cross; rose from the dead; ascended to heaven; and there intercedes for ever, that this blessing may be ours. What love can be compared to this? What character was ever so lovely, so endearing, so peculiarly divine?

As the peace of Christ also, this glorious possession assumes a new character of excellence and worth. In him, this peace was the result of consummate wisdom and supreme rectitude: a divine harmony of perfect intelligence and immeasurable love. It was a possession completely independent. None could give it; none could take it away. In the pure, serene, eternal mind of the Saviour it dwelt, of course, inseparable and for ever. It was the necessary and immortal offspring of immortal excellence: the coeternal splendour of light eternal. *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever he had formed the earth and the world; then was it by him, as one brought up with him; and was daily his delight, rejoicing alway before him: rejoicing* with a divine prescience *in the* future *habitable parts of the earth, and* placing *its delights in the sons of men.*

In his mediatorial residence among the children of apostate Adam; amid all his sorrows and labours, amid all the opposition, ejection, and persecution, which he experienced; amid all the living anguish and dying agonies

which he suffered; this celestial companion, this divine inmate of his bosom, perpetually sustained him; and diffused fortitude and serenity around his soul. Thus sustained, thus tranquillized, he smiled in agony, and triumphed in death.

To us as to him, it is peace *passing all understanding; peace which the world cannot give, nor take away.* Grace and mercy descend first in the train of infinite blessings, *from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ;* and peace enters our doors immediately behind them. A guest fresh from heaven, and from the presence of God, peace bears all the characteristics of the world from which she descends; of the region in which she was born; of the family to which she is allied; and of the parent, from whom she sprang. Gentle and serene, beautiful and lovely, she becomes a willing companion to every humble faithful follower of the Lamb; to every genuine child of God. Her own angelic disposition she breathes insensibly into the the soul; her softness and gentleness she infuses into the heart; and her living smiles she spreads over the aspect. At once, the man is changed into a new creature. His soul, before the region of darkness and storm, is cleared at once of the clouds by which it was overcast. Its tempestuous passions cease to rage and ravage; and a heavenly sunshine illumines the world within. The universe to him, heretofore a vast kingdom of war and opposition, is converted into a delightful residence of quiet and harmony; in which an immense *multitude* of the inhabitants, such as *no man can number,* are become his friends, and in which the hostilities of the rest will only work together for his good. God also, seen by him before *in clouds and darkness,* which were *very tempestuous round about him,* has unfolded to him the light of his countenance; and given him a lively and transporting earnest of serene, unclouded, everlasting day.

SERMON LXXXV.

CONSEQUENCES OF REGENERATION.

JOY IN THE HOLY GHOST.

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost.—ROM. XIV. 17.

ON the last sabbath, I considered the nature and importance of *spiritual peace.* I shall proceed to examine another consequence of regeneration; viz. *joy in the Holy Ghost.*

In the text the apostle declares that *the kingdom of God* is formed of *righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost.* By this kingdom he intends plainly, not the kingdom of creation, nor the kingdom of Providence, nor, in a strict sense, what is usually called the kingdom of grace. The word kingdom is here used in a figurative manner; and denotes *the effects of that secret, invisible, incomprehensible influence over the hearts of mankind, which is exerted by the Spirit of grace in the work of sanctification.* This influence is the great engine of the divine government over the hearts of intelligent beings; and is often with the utmost propriety termed in the gospel the kingdom of God. Of this influence, *righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost,* are *effects* primarily important; and in the text are figuratively called by a name which in simple language, would probably belong to *the cause of their existence.* In a similar manner is the term used by Christ, Luke xvii. 20. *The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say concerning it, Lo here, or Lo there: for the kingdom of God is within you.*

Of these three great effects of the energy of the divine Spirit, the first, viz. *righteousness,* here used for holiness, or evangelical virtue, is in the soul the cause of the two last.

From righteousness in this sense spring of course the peace and joy of the spiritual character. *Joy in the Holy Ghost,* therefore, is obviously a consequence of regeneration. In the text, as well as in the order of nature, it is subjoined to peace; although we are ever to remember, that they always exist together in the same mind, and at the same time.

In examining this subject, the following considerations have occurred to me as particularly deserving the attention of a religious assembly.

I. *The joy spoken of in the text is not a mere natural joy.*

By *natural joy,* I intend *the pleasure which is found by the mind in natural, or physical good, whether possessed or expected.* Such is the pleasure which we experience in property, health, friends, food, and other gratifications of a similar nature. Such is the pleasure found in the contemplation of beauty, novelty, and greatness; in the multitude, variety, and sublimity, of the works of creation and Providence; or in the skill, power, and wisdom, displayed by their Author. Such, also, is the satisfaction experienced in the mere belief, that God is reconciled to us, and become our friend and benefactor.

All these I acknowledge to be innocent and lawful enjoyments. I acknowledge them to be enjoyments which we are not merely permitted, but required to experience; and to be enjoyments also in greater or less degrees experienced by every sanctified mind. Still they may may be possessed in a manner, merely natural; and by a mind utterly destitute of the evangelical character. When the Christian rejoices in these things, he rejoices virtuously; because he regards them with just views. But when a sinner rejoices in them, he regards them with erroneous views, and with emotions destitute of virtue. Evangelical joy in these things is one of *the fruits of the Spirit.* But nothing experienced by a sinner can be a peculiar characteristic of a Christian. Nor is any genuine fruit of the Spirit ever found in an unsanctified mind.

II. *Joy in the Holy Ghost is however joy in God.*

God is the only solid foundation of joy to the universe; and is seen and acknowledged in this character by every

virtuous being. In this most pleasing and magnificent manner he is every where exhibited in the Scriptures. *Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous!* says the Psalmist, Psal. xxxiii. 1. *Thou shalt rejoice in the Lord,* saith the prophet Isaiah, *and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.* Isa. xli. 16. *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God,* saith our Saviour, Isa. lxi. 10. *Be glad, then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God,* saith Joel, chap. ii. 23. *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall: yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation.* Hab. iii. 17, 18. The same language is adopted by the Virgin Mary, and by St. Paul, in the New Testament; and is applied by Christ to the apostles, and to the whole body of Christians, either as an account of facts, or as a precept directing their duty.

To revelation reason joins her fullest testimony, and easily discerns, when informed of the true character of God by revelation, that in him the proper, rational, supreme, and eternal joy of his intelligent creatures must ultimately centre; and that he is the object to be thus enjoyed, as well as the source whence this enjoyment flows. The eternal, unchangeable, almighty, all-knowing, the infinitely just, faithful, true, benevolent, and merciful mind is in an infinite degree a more beautiful, lovely, and glorious object in itself, than any or than all others. Of such a mind all the conduct, all the manifestations, are accordant with its true and essential nature; are beautiful, glorious, and lovely, like itself. These amazing considerations are also enhanced in a manner literally boundless, by the great fact, that from this mind sprang all the objects of admiration and delight which are found in the universe.

In the power of God, we are presented with an everlasting and unlimited source of joy, when it is considered as perfect sufficiency for every great and good purpose; for the accomplishment of whatever wisdom can approve, or virtue delight in; and for the accomplishment of this in the manner which is perfectly desirable.

In the knowledge of God, there is an endless source of

delight; as the original spring whence have flowed the innumerable beings and events of the universe, together with their attributes, operations, and effects. In the perpetually diversified structure the wonderful purposes, and the no less wonderful uses of these, is the state of the infinite mind, as the origin of whatever is great and good, presented to us in a manner perfect in itself, and endlessly delightful to every virtuous beholder. The mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, even of this world, are full of these displays; and the structure, powers, and operations, of a single being, furnish a field of investigation altogether too wide for the comprehension of any human understanding.

In the bounty of God, we behold an amazing source of gratitude, and of the pleasure always found in that most amiable and delightful emotion. We here discern ample provision made for our continuance in being, for our daily wants, and for all our reasonable wishes. Our food and raiment are most liberally supplied; our innocent desires most richly gratified; our taste delighted with the beauty, novelty, and grandeur, of the world around us; our eyes charmed with the glorious prospects of the earth and the heavens; and our ears feasted with melody and harmony.

In the mercy of God, the soul is assured that its sins may be forgiven, and its nature renewed; is presented with the most illustrious proofs of divine love, and the overflowings of infinite tenderness towards a world of apostates. It is *here* furnished with the greatest and best gift of God, evangelical virtue; and *beyond the grave* is secured in the endless possession of unmingled and unfading happiness. From sin, its own most debased character, and from misery, its proper reward, it is here presented with a final deliverance; is instamped with the image of God, and admitted to the kingdom of the blessed.

In the truth and faithfulness of this perfect Being, the soul is furnished with entire security that his declarations are steadfast and immoveable, and that *his promises endure for ever.* The encouragement given to it therefore, of both present and future good, is encouragement on which perfect reliance may be placed, and with regard to which disappointmen can never rise either here or hereafter. When we remember that one of these promises to Christians is,

that *all things shall be theirs;* and another, *that all things shall work together for their good;* the importance of this consideration appears to be literally infinite. On these declarations the virtuous universe reposes with absolute safety and with reliance which will strengthen for ever.

The justice of God is seen to be the immensely grand and awful, yet the immensely beneficial, administration of the vast kingdom of JEHOVAH. In the exercise of this glorious attribute are secured all the rights of intelligent creatures, and their infallible and complete protection from every ultimate wrong. The least right and the least wrong of the least individual, are as firmly assured as the greatest interests of angels and archangels. By this amazing mind nothing is forgotten or unregarded. Lazarus at the gate is as effectually remembered as David on the throne, or Gabriel *standing before God* in the highest heavens.

Alone and *to a world of sinners*, the justice of God would be only great and terrible; but harmonizing with mercy in all its dictates it renders, even to our view, the character of the great possessor transcendently excellent and amiable. What would become of the universe were God to be unjust? What creature would for a moment be safe; what interest uninvaded?

Of these glorious attributes we need not, in order to find displays, cast our eyes abroad into *incomprehensible* systems of worlds and beings: at home by our firesides, in our friends, in our families, in our bodies, and in our minds, they are seen with high advantage and supreme endearment. Are we fed? The hand which feeds us is that of our heavenly Father. Are we clothed? He made the flax to grow; he formed the fleece; he gave the silk-worm skill to spin her mysterious thread; and brought to us the necessary and beautiful materials to form our attire. Are we in health? He preserves in their pristine strength the numerous powers of our bodies, sends the stream of life through our veins, and animates our hearts with wonderful and unceasing energy. Do we see? He contrived the eye. Do we hear? He fashioned the ear. Do we think, and choose, and feel? He lighted up the lamp of reason in our minds. Are we and ours virtuous? He poured out the Spirit of sanctification upon our minds. Have we enjoyments? He

provided them. Have we hopes? They all sprang from his bounty, and are secured by his unchangeable promise.

All these divine considerations are enhanced beyond measure, by the nature of those attributes which may be termed qualifications of these. The *omnipresence* of God teaches us, that all these perfections are every where present, every where ready to be employed in the production of good. His *immutability* proves to us, that these perfections will never be changed in their nature, degree, and operations; and that as he has thus acted, so he will always act in the same manner. The *eternity* of God shows us, that these perfections will know no end; and that therefore the enjoyments of his children will endure for ever. Thus what God is here, he is every where; what he is now, he will be through eternity.

In the venerable and endearing characters of the Father, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier, of mankind, God appears as the source of peculiar joy. *As the Father of mankind,* he appears as a sovereign and lawgiver, offended by our rebellion, but with infinite kindness proffering to us forgiveness and reconciliation; as sending for this benevolent end his beloved Son to expiate our sins, and his Holy Spirit to renew our hearts and lives; and thus as opening his arms, unasked and undesired, to receive his penitent and returning children.

In the endearing character of the Son, he appears with boundless benignity as *making an end of sin, finishing transgression, and bringing in everlasting righteousness;* as becoming man that we might again be united to God; as dying that we might live; as rising from the dead, ascending to heaven, assuming the government of all things, and interceding before the throne of infinite Majesty, that we might rise hereafter incorruptible and immortal; might follow him to the heavens; enjoy the infinite blessings of his administration; and be accepted as his faithful friends at the final day. Christ is the *corner-stone* of this *living* and glorious building, formed, according to the glowing language of St. Peter, of *living stones, a spiritual house of God, eternal in the heavens.* On him, the sole foundation, the vast structure is erected to stand for ever.

By the Spirit of truth is this mighty work completed.

With infinite kindness and patience he awakens, convinces, renews, and purifies, the soul; forms it for endless holiness, and endless life; and conducts it through this earthly wilderness to the land of promise beyond the grave.

In all these things united is the love of God seen with supreme advantage, as immense, unchanging, and eternal; as endeared with all possible tenderness; as overcoming the most perverse obstinacy; as forgiving the greatest guilt; as flowing out to enemies and apostates condemned by unerring justice, and discarded by the virtuous universe.

To *the Christian* in all these respects is God the source of supreme and unceasing joy. As *a Christian* he has become a new creature, entered into a new creation, and enrolled himself as a subject of a new and immortal kingdom. This kingdom is a kingdom in which will be progressively accomplished, universal, entire, and everlasting good. For this end it was created: to this end it is uniformly conducted by the all-pervading, all-ruling hand of JEHOVAH. The subjects of it are universally *children of light*. Their intercourse is an endless succession of diversified virtue and loveliness. Purity, dignity, and excellence, are their inherent characteristics; and everlasting happiness and glory their final destination. In all that they are, in all that they do, and in all that is done to them, God himself rejoices with intense and eternal joy.

With this new kingdom the Christian has begun an everlasting connexion. His union to the members of it, and his intercourse with them, instead of terminating, will unceasingly become more intimate, more endearing, more exalted. The views of *their* minds and *his* are destined to become perpetually more and more just and comprehensive; *their* affections and *his* to be more pure, intense, and noble; their mutual friendship to be more sweet and serene; and their conduct to be, in an unceasing gradation, such as is proper to be exhibited in the house and presence of God.

In accordance with this state of things therefore will the whole scheme of the Christian's future being be formed. His plans will of course be concerted in such a manner as to embrace and promote eternal purposes; they will be the plans of an immortal being, destined to act with immortal beings in a boundless field of existence; the plans of a

dutiful and faithful subject of the infinite Ruler; of a child warmed with perpetual and filial piety to his divine Parent; of a brother finally united to *the household which is named after Christ;* of a redeemed, sanctified, returning prodigal, brought back with infinite compassion and infinite expense to the house of his Father, and welcomed with exquisite joy by the family of the first-born. To glorify God, to bless his fellow-creatures, and to be blessed by both, will be the combined and perfect end for which he lives. This end he will pursue in a world where no obstructions ever arise, where no toil ever wearies, where no disappointments ever intrude, where no temptations ever arrest, and where no enemies ever alarm; where his affections cannot be too intense, nor his pursuits too ardent, and where his only professional business will be, to be virtuous and happy. As a citizen of this new and heavenly kingdom, the Christian begins his course of spiritual life: all these things are already become *his*. God is his father, Christ his redeemer, the Spirit of grace his sanctifier, and all the children of virtue are his brethren. In the present world he is only a stranger and a sojourner; he regards it therefore as a mere lodging, and fixes his eye on heaven as his home.

With this new character, all things with which he here converses assume to his eye a new aspect; and are filled with the presence and agency of God. *The heavens declare his glory, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. The year,* in all its revolutions, *is crowned with his goodness.* The spring is his beauty, blooming in endless varieties of elegance and splendour. Summer and autumn are manifestations of his bounty; filling his creatures with good. The winter is a solemn display of his majesty. Then *the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind, and in the storm; and the clouds are the dust of his feet.*

In his *own* blessings the Christian sees God in a manner still more delightful. His blessings are not mere enjoyment: they are gifts; unspeakably endeared by the hand from which they flow. When he is in prosperity; *the Lord is his shepherd, who maketh him to lie down in green pastures, and leadeth him beside the still waters; who prepareth a table before him in the presence of his enemies, who anoint-*

eth his head with oil; who causeth his cup to run over, and goodness and mercy to follow him all the days of his life. Is he in adversity? *The rod and staff of the same Shepherd support and comfort him.* Is he in doubt and darkness, where he is scarcely able to trace the path of life? He hears *a voice behind him, saying, This is the way: walk thou therein.* Is he *mourning in Zion? God appoints to him beauty for ashes, and the oil of joy for mourning.* Is he sick? God is his physician; and has already taught him to say, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.* Has he come to a dying bed? Christ has vanquished *death and the grave;* and has taught him to sing at their approach, *O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory?* Has he friends? *God has raised them up.* Has he children? they *are a heritage from the Lord.* Is the land of his nativity safe? God is *a wall of fire round about it.* Does religion flourish? God is *the glory in the midst of it.* The church to which he is united, is *a garden which the Lord hath planted.* Is it enlightened, quickened, and edified? It *is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.* Is it comforted? The consolations have come down from the heavenly Comforter. Is it protected? *The Lord hath created upon mount Zion, and upon all her assemblies, a cloud and a smoke by day, and a light of a flaming fire by night.*

Thus to the Christian all things in heaven and earth are full of God. Wherever he walks, wherever he is, he is surrounded with his presence; and *in that presence there is abundance of joy.* To him in his meditations, and in his worship, he instinctively turns, as the supreme object of his affections, and of his obedience. In loving, fearing, and serving him, *with all the heart,* he finds his chief delight; and becomes continually able, with more and more propriety and truth, to say, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth whom I desire beside thee?*

III. *The Christian rejoices in spiritual things universally.*

Spiritual things are those in which the power of the Spirit of grace is peculiarly visible and which, therefore, have

a peculiar tendency to improve us in the Christian character. In all things of this nature the Christian finds a peculiar joy. Particularly in *the word of God* he discovers multiplied streams of pure and increasing pleasure. Here all the transporting things already mentioned are made known to mankind. Here are disclosed the character, designs, and works, of the Creator: the rebellion, guilt, and condemnation, of man; and his restoration by forgiving, redeeming, and sanctifying love. Here the means of grace and salvation are revealed; the truths which we are to believe, and the precepts which we are to obey. Here *life and immortality are brought to light* by the Redeemer; and the path which leads to them is pointed out by the finger of God. The Bible is a window in his prison of hope, through which we look into eternity. It is the door of heaven, through which, opened by a divine hand, we cast our view into that glorious region; and behold the beauty, splendour, and happiness, which reign and triumph there for ever.

Here the Christian finds himself most mercifully checked in the hour of temptation by the threatenings of the law, and divinely allured to righteousness by promises and invitations. Behind him, Justice displays its *flaming sword*, to prevent him from returning to the by-paths of sin. Before him, Mercy calls, with the music of heaven, and the smile of infinite love, to quicken his course in the highway of holiness.

In the worship of the same glorious Being, the same delight is experienced, and with enhanced enjoyment. In his *closet*, like Moses, he *converses with God, face to face;* and, while he spreads all his wants and woes, all his sins and dangers, all his hopes and joys, before him, is assured of an *open reward*. In his *family*, when his nearest connexions are around him, he finds every comfort endeared by these beloved objects; and sweetened by the remembrance, that his *house is a house of God*. In *the sanctuary*, he unites with his fellow-Christians, *to ask counsel at the mercy-seat*, and to present before it prayers and praises, refined and exalted by evangelical sympathy. Here also all his virtuous affections and purposes are purified and strengthened by the heavenly influence of the holy day, and the holy place. Here grace is given, and glory anticipated.

At the table of Christ, and in *the celebration of the baptism,* his soul is refreshed and revived by the sight of the dying Saviour, expiating his sins, and of the Spirit of God, symbolically poured out as a divine cleansing, to purify his heart from moral pollution. Earth here borrows the aspect of heaven; and sublunary things are invested with no small degree of immortal beauty.

In the church of God, he sees a real, though imperfect, picture of *the general assembly of the first-born.* All Christians are his brethren, and fellow-travellers with him towards the heavenly kingdom in *the straight and narrow way that leads to life.* Their character, their hearts, their interests, their designs, are one. They are members of one family. They have *one Father, even God,* they have *one Lord,* even *Christ:* they have one sanctifier, and one comforter, even *the Spirit of grace.* Their hopes and fears, their doubts and discoveries, their joys and sorrows, are the same. On all the same divine image is instamped; the same evangelical beauty is visible. *Lovely and pleasant in their lives, in their death they are not divided.*

IV. *The Christian finds an exalted pleasure in the good enjoyed by others.*

In his view no truth is clearer, than that *it is more blessed to give than to receive.* With this truth he cheerfully accords; and finds in doing good to others an humble share of the same delight, which is enjoyed by the universal Benefactor in the overflowings of infinite beneficence to the creation. Nor is his enjoyment less exquisite, when good is done by those around him. In them as in him, real disinterested beneficence is a proof of sanctification. If the beneficence be *not* disinterested; he still possesses the joy of seeing his fellow-creatures made happy.

In the diffusion of the *divine* beneficence, also, he experiences a perpetual delight; while he beholds the illustrious exhibitions of the goodness of God, and shares in the comfort of all on whom it descends. Especially is this enjoyment exquisite, when sinners *are brought out of darkness into marvellous light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* Then souls, guilty and debased, condemned and ruined, are redeemed from everlasting sin and woe. Then

heaven is enlarged by the accession of new inhabitants; and the *joy* which is felt in that benevolent world over repenting sinners, trembles delightfully through his own bosom. The sight of a sanctified mind, of a redeemed and forgiven sinner, of endless virtue and immortal life begun, is the fairest and most enchanting prospect ever seen in the great kingdom of JEHOVAH.

V. *The joy of the Christian in this world, is the beginning of everlasting joy.*

To be spiritually minded is both *life and peace.* This mind is the mind of every Christian. Of course, *life and peace* eternal are begun in him, while he resides in this evil and melancholy world.

There are, indeed, many interruptions, diminutions, and preventions, of this glorious possession, accomplished by remaining sin, and its inseparable companion, *sorrow of heart.* But in the midst of all these he finds consolation often abundant, almost unceasing, and always sufficient for his wants. The promises of the gospel are continually before him. God, he knows, *will never leave* him *nor forsake* him. Christ, he knows, will *always be with him unto the end.* He may indeed be *cast down, but* he will *not* be *destroyed:* he may be *afflicted, but* he will *not be forsaken. The Father of his spirit* may, indeed, *smite him in his wrath for a small moment, yet with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on him.* In every gloomy and distressing day there will be gleams of sunshine, and openings of a serene, unclouded heaven. *In the dry and thirsty ground, where there is* apparently *no water,* and in the midst of a desolation visibly without limits, *the wilderness will* suddenly *rejoice and blossom as the rose.*

His piety is a seed, sown here in an unkind, barren soil, indeed, and under a wintry climate; but it will live, and grow, until it shall be transplanted to a happier region, beneath a more friendly sky: where it will shoot forth in its native strength and beauty. The flame of divine love, kindled feebly in his heart, will never cease to burn, until it shall rise, and glow, with unextinguishable ardour, beyond the grave. The light, which here dawns in darkness, and feebly illumines the surrounding gloom, will perpetually

shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. All his sins and sorrows will continually lessen, and recede, and fade: all his graces, consolations, and hopes, will expand, and improve: until the imperfect good, which he finds in this *vale of tears,* shall be lost in the everlasting beauty, happiness, and glory, of heaven.

SERMON LXXXVI.

CONSEQUENCES OF REGENERATION.

INCREASE OF GRACE.

The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.—PROV. IV. 18.

IN the last discourse I considered at large the *fourth consequence of regeneration.* I shall now proceed to examine two other consequences of this great change in man; commonly termed, *increase of grace,* and *perseverance to the end.*

In the text the progress of the renewed man, in holiness of character, is compared to the dawning light of the morning; which, barely perceptible at first, increases by gradations, also barely perceptible, until the sun, ascending above the horizon, sheds over the face of the earth the full beams of day.

By this image we are naturally taught the following things:

I. *That the holiness of the Christian is a beautiful object.*

II. *That it increases as he advances in life:* and,

III. *That it continues to the end.*

I. *The holiness of the Christian is a beautiful object.*

The views, which David, who uttered the instructions contained in this chapter, and which Solomon, who, under the influence of inspiration repeated them to *us,* formed of this evangelical subject, are sufficiently manifested in the text. It is here compared to the most beautiful of all the

objects in the natural world, presented to us in the most beautiful form; *viz.* the light of the sun, succeeding the darkness of the night, and advancing, through a most elegant and delightful progress, to the splendour of the perfect day. What this illustrious object is in the natural system, the holiness of the Christian is in the moral system.

In a similar manner it is spoken of throughout the Scriptures. It is styled by Christ the *pearl of great price.* It is said by David to be *more precious than thousands of gold and of silver.* It is said by Job, that *it cannot be gotten for gold; that silver shall not be weighed for the price thereof; that it cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, the precious onyx, or the sapphire; that no mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls; that the price of Wisdom is above rubies;* and that its *fame has been repeated* in the regions of *death* and *destruction.* It is styled by Moses the *beauty, and glory, of God* himself. *Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children: and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.*

In conformity to these declarations, those who possess this character are styled *the excellent of the earth, in whom God delights; chosen; wise; children of God; followers of Christ; born of the Spirit; the precious sons of Zion; comparable to fine gold; children of light; heirs of God; and brethren of Christ.* In all these appellations, the moral beauty, the loveliness of mind, possessed by Christians, as it appears to the eye of God, is strongly conspicuous; and its inestimable value is exhibited in the most forcible terms of which language is capable.

When we consider this subject in its own proper nature, and as viewed by human reason, we cannot but acknowledge the justice of the scriptural representations. The spirit, infused into man at his renovation, has been heretofore exhibited as the only voluntary source of happiness. This being admitted, as by unbiassed reason it must be, no other words can adequately describe either the excellence, the beauty, or the loveliness, of this disposition. Its value is of course proportioned to the good, of which it is the spring; and to this no limits can be affixed. In whatever degree it exists, and however humble it may be, it still partakes of the common nature. The gold may exist in par-

ticles of dust; still it is gold; and superior, both in value and lustre, to all the dross in the universe. He who consecrates his faculties, however small they may be, to the glory of God, and the good of the intelligent creation, possesses the angelic character; and is not an angel, only because his powers are inferior, and his disposition mixed, and hitherto imperfect.

But there is something still to be added to the beauty of the Christian character. The Christian, as has been uniformly taught in these discourses, is, in this world, imperfectly holy. From his remaining sin arise to him many circumstances incompatible with a state of perfection. Many temptations, many difficulties, and many sorrows, spring up in his progress towards heaven, which a glorified spirit cannot know. In his struggles with these; in the resolution with which he meets and encounters his spiritual enemies; in his contentions with *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride of life;* in his steady dependance on God; in his faithful prayers for divine aid; in his patience, submission, and fortitude, under sufferings; in his firm faith in the divine promises, and in his cheerful resignation of himself into the hands of God; there is often manifested a beauty and amiableness of character, which is probably seen in no other world beside this; but which must be approved and admired in every world where wisdom is allowed to decide.

In all the meek and lowly virtues of the Christian character, there is something pre-eminently delightful and endearing. I know not whether there is any character more strikingly beautiful and lovely than that of a penitent. Children, it seems to me, never interest us so deeply by any amiableness, and are never regarded with such peculiar endearment, as when they come to us with an ingenuous, cordial sorrow for their faults; a cheerful confession; and unfeigned designs of amendment. Such, in a peculiar degree, is the charming aspect of Christian penitence. On it *the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity* has declared himself pleased to *look;* and over it the joy of heaven is exquisitely enhanced.

II. *The holiness of the Christian increases as he advances in life.*

The very nature of the subject leads us, in a sense, irresistibly to the adoption of this doctrine. The regeneration of the Christian is his moral infancy. If we suppose him to live through even a moderate period after he is renewed, it is incredible, that his holiness should not increase in strength. The evangelical powers (if I may call them such) as certainly increase by the progress of time, and by successive exercise, as the natural powers. Indeed, the increase of the natural powers is, of course, an increase of those which are evangelical. Every illumination of the mind, every new degree of capacity which it acquires by thinking for more just and comprehensive thought, renders the intellect more vigorous for every future exertion. The word of God is to the Christian the chief object of intellectual investigation. The truths which it reveals are those on which he especially loves to dwell, and about which his mind is peculiarly enlightened by successive inquiry. It is here that his capacity is enlarged, and his intellectual strength increased.

In a manner equally natural, his affections also improve in their energy. Parents love their children more intensely, because they have loved them long. In the same manner friendship is continually strengthened by time, and in the same manner all our other affections. What is true of these, is equally true of evangelical affections. They also, in their own nature, become more firm, more vigorous, more operative, from the mere fact, that they are often exercised. So far as experience teaches us, or reason is able to divine, all the powers of intelligent beings, by a common law, increase in their strength, whenever they are regularly exercised.

With these dictates of reason those of the Scriptures perfectly harmonize. Were this not the fact, however plain the conclusions of reason might seem, they would probably fall short of satisfying a solicitous inquirer into this subject. By the Scriptures every question concerning religion is to be decided; and happily the decision in the present case is complete. There we are taught, that *the good seed*, the word of God, when sown in good ground, *springs up* and *bears fruit thirty, sixty*, and *a hundred-fold*. There we are informed, that Christians *abound more and more* in the va-

rious graces of the gospel; that *the faith of the Thessalonians grew exceedingly;* that *the love of every one of them abounded towards their fellow-saints;* and that *the faith of the Romans increased in such a manner,* as to be *spoken of throughout all the world.*

The *prayers of St. Paul* also, for his fellow-Christians; prayers dictated as you well remember by the Spirit of God; perfectly coincide with this scheme. *The Lord,* said he to the Thessalonians, *make you to increase and to abound in love one towards another, and towards all men.* To the Colossians he says, *We do not cease to pray for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye may walk worthy of the Lord, unto all well pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.* Of the same tenor are his petitions for Christians of other churches.

With these declarations and prayers, the *commands* given us in the Scriptures concerning this subject, entirely agree. *Giving all diligence,* says the apostle Peter, *add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.* And again, *Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This thing I do,* says St. Paul to the Philippians, *forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ. Brethren, be followers together of me.* Generally it may be observed, that the precepts and exhortations given by St. Paul to the several churches, are of the same nature: the great object of them being to promote the advancement of Christians in holiness.

Finally, Of this advancement, thus made the subject of declarations, prayers, and precepts, the Christian is amply assured by *promises,* abundantly found in the Scriptures. If he faithfully endeavours to improve himself in the divine life; if he humbly and fervently ask the blessing of God upon his labours; he knows that on the one hand the grace of God will be sufficient for him, and on the other, that this almighty friend *will never leave him nor forsake him.* That

holy and good Spirit, the immediate author of all his spiritual blessings, will dwell in him; will lead him; will help his infirmities; and finally and safely conduct him to the possession of his heavenly inheritance. Thus while he faithfully *waits on the Lord,* he will *renew his strength; will run, and not be weary; will walk, and not faint.*

The truth of the doctrine under consideration may now be considered as removed beyond every doubt; if indeed any doubt can be supposed to have arisen concerning the subject. Still it is of no small importance, that we not only receive the general proposition, but understand also the particulars of which it is constituted; the things of which this improvement of the Christian character consists. I observe, therefore,

1st. *That the Christian increases in divine knowledge.*

Particularly, he will improve in *the knowledge of God.*

By this I do not intend, that he will advance in the philosophical knowledge of this great and glorious Being. In this knowledge he indeed may, and usually will, increase; and so may multitudes of those who are not Christians. The knowledge here intended, is especially of a spiritual nature; that which is called by Solomon, *the knowledge of the holy;* the knowledge which our Saviour declares *to be eternal life;* the knowledge which is possessed only by those who love God, and is essentially derived from their affection to him. As the Christian reads the Bible, which will ever be one of his favourite employments, he will find God, the great subject of it, every where exhibited to his view; and exhibited continually in lights ever varying from each other. In the succession, and in the comparison, of an endless multitude of passages, all of them diverse, and all of them instructive, he will continually gain new apprehensions of the greatness and wisdom, the goodness, mercy, and truth, of the being from whom he derived his own existence, and from whom he received all his blessings.

These apprehensions will be enlarged and improved by his attention to *the works of creation and providence.* The works of God are always full of instruction to those who read and love his word. Every person who peruses the Psalms with attention must have observed, how much instruction, and what elevated affections and purposes, David

acquired from this source. Here, like David, every devout mind will see clearly elucidated the truth, reasonableness, and wisdom, of very many scriptural doctrines; the propriety and excellence of very many precepts; the cogency of very many motives to his duty; and the fulfilment of very many predictions and promises. These, in innumerable instances, although unregarded by men of this world, will force themselves hourly and irresistibly on the eye of the Christian; for they are all congenial with his wishes, hopes, and designs; and to dwell upon them will be his peculiar delight.

The dispensations of God to himself, his family, his friends, and his country, will in a peculiar manner cast a new light over all these interesting subjects. Whatever immediately concerns ourselves, and ours, becomes of course an object of our minute attention. As it is more thoroughly studied, so it is necessarily better understood, than the same things contained in dispensations to others. In our own blessings and afflictions, many exhibitions are made to us of the character of God: and many proofs of his wisdom, goodness, and truth, are realized, which will hardly be derived from any other source. Here our Maker is seen in a thousand lights of providential care and kindness, as our preserver and benefactor; as the proper object of ultimate hope and confidence; of which we should have known little or nothing from any other source. At the same time, this knowledge is deeply endeared to us, or solemnly impressed by the events which disclose it; and is therefore deeply felt, and long remembered. Hence it becomes a part of our current thoughts; and is ready to be applied on every proper occasion to every useful purpose. In this manner the mind becomes enriched with a train of the most useful views, solid arguments, and important doctrines; which raise it from its former level to a nobler elevation on the scale of intelligent being; and furnish it for higher enjoyment, and more extensive usefulness, in the kingdom of its Maker.

In a similar manner Christians improve in the knowledge of their duty. All the duty of the Christian is originally learned from the Scriptures. As his acquaintance with this sacred volume enlarges, the precepts which comprise

the whole of his duty, are more and more known, remembered, compared, and made to elucidate each other. These from time to time he applies to his own practical concerns; and thus as they pass under his eye from day to day, he learns more accurately the nature, extent, and spirituality, of the precepts themselves, and the safest and best modes of applying them to the conduct of his life. In this manner the scriptural precepts may be said to be always at hand; always ready for use: so as to guide him safely and happily, in many cases where others would be compelled to struggle with doubts and perplexity.

It ought to be added, that the knowledge of the Christian, acquired immediately from Scripture and from his own experience, is greatly increased by the conversation of his fellow-Christians, and by the valuable books written by wise and good men concerning the subjects of religion.

Finally. Christians greatly improve in the knowledge of themselves.

The importance of *self-knowledge* is so obvious, that the ancient Heathen considered the precept which enjoins it, as having descended from heaven. They were not deceived, for the Scriptures directly require us to *examine ourselves, to prove ourselves,* and *to know ourselves.* A part of this knowledge, and that indispensable, is conveyed to us in the sacred canon; and this the Christian makes more and more his own, by continually searching for it in that invaluable book. But indispensable as this knowledge is, it is comparatively of little importance to the Christian, until he has learned its proper import by applying it to his own spiritual condition, to the discovery of his true character, to the detection of his sins, to the investigation of his duty, to the excitement of his fears, to the establishment of his hopes, the alleviation of his sorrows, and the increase of his joys. This knowledge the Christian can gain only by *self-examination;* by looking daily into his heart, by scrutinizing his life, and by comparing all that he thinks, and feels, and says, and does, with the rules of his duty, prescribed in the word of God.

In this manner the best of men will learn, that they are, in many respects, widely different beings from what an ordinary and gross attention to this part of their duty would in-

duce them to believe. They will discern that they commit many sins, where otherwise they would suppose themselves guilty of few; that many actions which they have before thought innocent, are really sinful; that sinful actions are much more criminal than they have been accustomed to believe; that their virtuous actions are fewer, less meritorious, and less acceptable to God, than they have been ready to suppose; and that themselves are much farther than they have been aware from the perfection required by the Scriptures. In this very manner, there is reason to believe St. Paul arrived at those just views of his own character, which are expressed in the latter part of the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans; and in this manner Christians in every age and country have acquired almost all the self-knowledge which they have ever possessed.

By these efforts the good man acquires much more just, as well as more humble apprehensions of what he is; discerns that *in many things* he and all others *offend;* that in every thing he *comes short of the praise,* that is, *the approbation, of God;* that in his best services there is much to lament and much to be forgiven; and that new zeal, watchfulness, faithfulness, and prayer, are demanded of him, both by his interest and by his duty. At the same time he clearly perceives the indispensable necessity of being more humble, submissive, diligent, prayerful; less censorious towards others; less attentive to the little and more to the great concerns of the Christian life; more patient, gentle, meek, and amiable; and more strenuous in his opposition to every lust, temptation, and enemy.

2dly. *The Christian improves in his affections.*

By the great change which was made in his character, when of a sinner he became a Christian, styled in the Scriptures regeneration, and denoted by several other names of an import generally similar, his affections were for the first time turned from the world to God. At this period his spiritual views were very limited and imperfect; and his affections in an infantine state. Every exercise of them was a kind of novelty; a thing to which he had not been accustomed, and therefore performed, if I may be allowed the term, crudely. Ardent, and even violent, they might be, and at times probably were; but not steady and

firm; partaking more of the sudden and desultory character of the natural passions, than of the settled energy of an established habit: and resembling more in their operations the unequal efforts of a raw recruit, than the regular advances of a veteran. In every such case there is usually much of earth, mingled with a little of heaven. Joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, at this time often, perhaps usually, abound; and those in some instances excessive. But we are apt to look in vain for a stable, uniform course of life; the energy which is customarily ready to act, and act with vigour; the serious consideration by which it is taught to operate usefully; and the serenity by which it is most naturally accompanied. In vain shall we here search in ordinary cases, for that sober fear which, always awake, most usefully warns us of the approach of temptation, and the danger of sin; for that fixed hope, which *quietly*, as well as humbly, *waits for the salvation of God;* for those calm and determined purposes of duty, which are unremittedly carried into execution; and for those milder and more endearing joys, and that more regularly recurring peace, which are found by a mind well disciplined to the Christian life. Hope here is apt suddenly to give place to fear, and sometimes to despondency; zeal to be succeeded by *indifference*: and the most brilliant sunshine to be overcast by clouds and gloom. It will be readily admitted, that such a state is in many respects undesirable.

As the Christian advances in his progress, all these things often, to say the least, are materially changed. The exercise of his pious affections, instead of being new and occasional, becomes by frequent repetition a habit. His love to God is by degrees changed into the settled temper, the fixed energy, of his soul. More calm, more uniform, though less violent, it acquires a strength, a stability, which nothing violent ever possessed. Where new and ardent converts will tremble, and bend, and even be overturned, he will stand immoveable; and will thus prove, that he is *deeply rooted in the faith*. Of the same fixed nature will be his affections towards his fellow-men. The *benevolence* which *is the fulfilment of* the second command of *the moral law*, holds an even course in the mind of the Christian with his love to God; and increases in its stability and energy

in the same manner by becoming habitual. Originally, the exercises of this affection, those at least which were vigorous, and therefore objects of particular attention to the mind, were occasional, and in a comparative sense solitary. Like all other occasional things, they were at times weaker or stronger, according to the circumstances by which they were attended. They were also brought into existence, often at least, against motives of considerable efficacy; against the intrusion of other affections of a worldly nature; the power of prejudice; the calls of business; the care, and the apprehended interests, of one's family; the spirit of a sect or party; and the pride of self-consistency. The man also has hitherto known very imperfectly the pleasure which springs from the exercise of benevolence; and therefore very imperfectly realizes the pleasure which he may find in exercising it again. His former passions and habits still retain much of their ancient hold upon him; and still influence not a little of his conduct. Hence his benevolence is in many instances greatly impeded; and in many others prevented perhaps from operating at all.

From all these disadvantages the Christian, in his progress through life, gradually escapes; and acquires gradually the contrary advantages. His love to his fellow-men becomes by degrees a habit, more and more fixed, uniform, and ever ready to operate. With every exercise, it gains strength. The pleasure which it yields is more uniformly found; and exists in a higher degree. Hence it is more regularly exercised; and in all its exercises is more efficacious.

The same things are equally true of the Christian's opposition to sin. By the superior knowledge which he acquires of the nature of this *evil and bitter thing*, and by his experience of the pain and sorrow which are its regular consequences, he learns to regard it with habitual hatred and fear. His eye therefore is watchfully open to mark the approach of temptation, and the *appearance of evil*.

In a similar manner also increases the Christian's *attachment to his duty*. Attachment to our duty necessarily bears a direct proportion to our hatred of sin; for every voluntary or negligent omission of known duty is itself a

sin. All our duty also is obedience to God; and a love to it increases of course with our love. *This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.* The pleasure also of performing our duty, and the strength of habit generated by it, will lend their whole force to increase this attachment. But the time forbids me to expatiate on this part of the subject.

3dly. *Christians improve also in purity and amiableness of life.*

If the things which have been observed under the former heads be admitted, this will be perceived to follow of course. He whose affections become better, will in a sense necessarily live a better life. Wherever love to God prevails in greater degrees; devotion, public, private, and secret, will regularly be performed in a manner more regular more sincere, more pure, and more acceptable. Wherever love to man increases in strength; truth will be more exactly spoken; justice more uniformly done; beneficence more widely diffused; and the forgiveness of enemies more cheerfully yielded. In persons of whom this is the character, the pain of self-denial will in a great measure vanish; and to communicate to others our property and our services, will be attended with little or none of that reluctance but too commonly visible even in good men. In a word, the Christian is taught by his own experience, as he had before been taught by his Saviour, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive.*

It is however carefully to be remembered, that *all these desirable things are wrought into the Christian's mind and life by the power of the Holy Spirit.* We *work out* our *salvation with fear and trembling*, when *God works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure.* Without the influence of this divine agent, nothing comparatively would be done; but with it the Christian will himself labour both vigorously and successfully. For his encouragement let him remember, that whenever he is himself willing to lay strong hold on his duty, and will seek for the assistance of this glorious agent, he has the best reasons to believe, that it will not be denied.

It ought also to be added in this place, that realizing

views of the approach of death, judgment, and eternity, will leave a powerful influence to quicken the efforts which the Christian makes for his advancement in holiness.

In conformity to these observations, we see Christians actually growing better and better as they advance through life. We see them more pious; more benevolent; more self-denying; more humble; more weaned from the world; more spiritually minded; and universally possessed in higher degrees of the disposition which fits them to become inhabitants of heaven. It obviously costs them less to be meek under provocations, and patient under injuries, to part with their property, or employ their labour, for charitable purposes. The smaller troubles of life sit lighter upon them: and the greater, they endure with more resignation and fortitude. Universally, they are more solicitous concerning their duty, and less studious of their own convenience. There is therefore more to be approved, and less to be blamed, in the conduct of their lives.

It is not intended here, that this is the regular and uniform tenor of the Christian life. The improvement of the Christian character is unquestionably, to a greater or less degree, irregular and interrupted; in some Christians indeed less, and in others more. Some backslide in a melancholy and shameful manner, and for periods comparatively long; while others appear to advance with a steady and regular approximation towards the measure of the perfect man.

Neither is it intended, that cold, careless, lazy Christians, will find the blessings which have been mentioned in this discourse. *The diligent hand maketh rich* in spiritual as well as in temporal good. He who wishes to secure these blessings, must, on the one hand, watch, and pray, and on the other *do whatsoever he findeth to do with his might.*

Among the attainments, made by such as have been Christians for a length of time, I will mention one; and will then conclude the discourse. This is, *that they are almost universally more catholic than those who are young.* By *catholic* here, I do not mean what in modern times is frequently meant by the word. This honourabe term, like many others, has been purloined by men, without worth, to denote, and to ornament, a part of their own unworthy

character. It has been employed to designate a shameful indifference to truth and error, to virtue and sin. This is a direct contrast to the spirit of the men of whom I have been speaking. These men are more attached to truth, and more opposite to error; more ardent in their love to virtue, and their hatred of sin. But they are possessed of more gentleness and more charitableness in their thoughts; more candour in their judgments: more sweetness in their dispositions; and more evangelical tenderness and moderation in their conduct. They are less ready to censure, and more pleased to commend. Truth they prize more for its own sake; and are less solicitous to ask from whom it comes. Error they oppose in all men: especially in themselves and their friends. Little things they value less, and great ones more. On the names, so numerously found in the Christian world and so highly valued by many who inhabit it, they place little importance. On the parties and sects which disgrace that world, they look only with disapprobation and regret. To real and evangelical worth they attach high consideration. Over the feuds and janglings which have so extensively prevailed among the professed followers of Christ, and often about subjects of little moment, they cast an eye of compassion; and lament that those whom Christ has loved; for whom he died; who will finally be placed at the right hand of the Judge; and who will be united for ever in the friendship of heaven: should be kept asunder, alienated, engaged in contention, and at times even embarked in hostilities, for reasons which they will blush to recite before the last tribunal, and which will awaken shame, if shame can be awakened, in heaven itself.

These men furnish one illustrious practical proof, that *the holiness of Christians increases through life.*

SERMON LXXXVII.

CONSEQUENCES OF REGENERATION.

PERSEVERANCE.

The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.—PROV. IV. 18.

IN the preceding discourse I observed, that the text naturally teaches us the following doctrines.

I. *That the holiness of the Christian is a beautiful object;*

II. *That it increases as he advances in life;*

III. *That it continues to the end.*

The two first of these doctrines I have already examined. I will now proceed to a consideration of the third.

As this doctrine has been, and still is, vigorously disputed; it will be necessary to make it the subject of a particular examination. In doing this I shall first adduce several arguments as a direct proof of the doctrine; and shall then answer the principal objections.

1st. *It is irrational to suppose, that God would leave a work, towards which so much has been done, unaccomplished.*

To effectuate the salvation of such as believe in Christ, God has sent him, to become incarnate, to live a life of humiliation and suffering, and to die upon the cross. He has raised him from the dead, exalted him at his own right hand, and constituted him, at once, an intercessor for his children, and the head over all things unto the church. He has also sent the Spirit of grace, to complete by his almighty energy this work of infinite mercy, in sanctifying, enlightening, and quickening, the soul, and conducting it to heaven. Now, let me ask, Is it not in the nature of the case incredible, that JEHOVAH should commence and carry on this work with such an amazing apparatus of labour and splendour, and leave it unfinished? Is it not incredible, that an omniscient and omnipotent Being should form a

purpose of this nature; should discover, in this wonderful manner, that he had it so much at heart; and should yet suffer himself to be frustrated in the end? Who can reconcile this supposition with the perfections of God?

2dly. *The continuance of saints in holiness follows irresistibly from their election.*

It is unnecessary, for the purposes of this discourse, that I should inquire into the metaphysical nature of election. It is sufficient for my design, that saints are declared, abundantly throughout the Scriptures, to *be chosen of God.* Thus, Rev. xvii. 14, the angel declares to John concerning the followers of the LAMB, that *they are called, chosen, and faithful.* Thus, Luke xviii. 7, Christ, speaking of his followers, says, *And shall not God avenge his own elect,* or chosen? Thus St. Paul, Rom. viii. 33, *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?* Thus St. Peter, in his First Epistle, chap. ii. 9, *Ye are a chosen generation:* and thus throughout the Scriptures.

It is to be remembered, that this appellation is given to Christians *universally.* In the passages already quoted, it is plain, that the names *elect* and *chosen*, which, you know, are the same in the Greek, are equivalent to *saints* or *Christians;* and accordingly are addressed to them without distinction. The same observation is, with the same truth, applicable to the numerous passages of Scripture in which this language is adopted.

Of all these persons it is often said, that they were *chosen from the beginning;* or *from before the foundation of the world.* Thus St. Paul, 2 Thess. ii. 13, addressing the members of that church, says, *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.* Thus also Ephes. i. 4, the same apostle, addressing the Christians at Ephesus, says, *According as he hath chosen us in him;* that is, Christ; *before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame, before him in love; Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.* From these passages, and from many others of similar import, it is clear, that Christians are *chosen by God, unto salvation, from the beginning;* or *from before the foundation of the world.* But

can it be supposed, that a purpose of God, thus formed, will be frustrated? As this is declared of Christians, *as such;* it is evident, that it is alike applicable to *all* Christians. If therefore, any Christian ceases to be holy; this purpose of God, solemnly adopted and declared, will in one instance be frustrated: and in every instance in which this event takes place. Thus far, then, God will be finally disappointed of one end of his government, really proposed by him, and expressly announced to the universe. Who can believe this concerning the Creator?

3dly. *If Christians continue not in holiness unto the end, the intercession of Christ will be frustrated.*

In John xvii. 20, Christ, after having prayed for his apostles, says, verse 20th, *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee: that they also may be one in us.* In this petition Christ prays the Father, that *all* those who should believe on him through the word of the apostles; that is, all Christians; may become partakers of that divine union, which, in the heavens, is the most perfect created resemblance of the ineffable union of the Father and the Son. If, then, any Christian fails of sharing in this union, the prayer of Christ here recited will not be answered.

4thly. *If the holiness of Christians does not continue unto the end, the joy of heaven over their conversion is groundless, and in vain.*

Our Saviour informs us, that *there is joy over one*, that is, over every, *sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance.* No error exists in heaven. All the perceptions of its inhabitants are accordant with truth: all their emotions are founded in truth. The joy excited there by the continuance of ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance (that is, persons perfectly just) in their holiness, is a joy founded on the everlasting holiness of these persons, and the everlasting happiness by which it is inseparably attended. The joy excited by the repentance of a sinner, is, however, greater than even this. As this is unconditionally asserted by Christ; it is unnecessary for me, in the present case, to inquire into the reasons of the fact. But a joy excited by the repent-

ance of a sinner, whose everlasting holiness, and consequent everlasting happiness, is uncertain; nay, who may never be holy nor happy at all, beyond the first and feeblest efforts and enjoyments of a Christian in his infantine state; cannot be founded in the truth, nor dictated by wisdom. Nay, it cannot be accordant with common sense. Upon the plan here adopted, the object on which this joy is founded, although a penitent to-day, may be a reprobate to-morrow; may thus finally lose both his holiness and his happiness; and, becoming a more guilty, may of course become a more miserable wretch, than if he had never repented. In this case there would be, upon the whole, no foundation for joy at all; and the inhabitants of heaven would in many instances, instead of rejoicing rationally, and on solid grounds, be merely tantalized by the expectation of good which they were never to realize.

What in this case would be the conduct of rational men in the present world, we have instances enough of their conduct, in cases substantially of a similar nature, to furnish us with an unerring answer to this question. They would, as in all cases of such uncertainty they actually do, indulge a timorous, trembling hope, that the case might end well; that the penitent might persevere, and finally become safe. They would experience a degree of satisfaction, that this first step had been taken, because it was indispensable to the rest; and would feel a continual, anxious suspense, lest others equally indispensable should not follow. What wise and good men in this world would feel on such an occasion, wiser and better men in the world to come must of necessity also feel: and much more intensely; because they comprehend the subject in a manner so much clearer, juster, and more perfect. Of course their suspense, their anxiety, must exist in a far higher degree. Such a suspense, such an anxiety, must, one would think, embitter even the happiness of heaven.

Frustrated expectations of great good, also, are in this world sources of extreme sorrow. The same fact must in that benevolent world be a source of the same sorrow. But how often, according to this scheme, must such expectations be there frustrated. Can this be reconcilable with a state of unmingled happiness?

5thly. *That the holiness of Christians should not continue to the end, is inconsistent with many scriptural declarations.*

We know, saith St. John, that we *have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* 1 John iii. 14. It is impossible for any person to know, that he has passed from death unto life, unless he has actually thus passed. But St. John declares, that himself and such other Christians as love the brethren have this knowledge; or, perhaps more conformably with the apostle's real design, all Christians *know this who know* that they love the brethren. The love of the brethren is certain, absolute proof that all those in whom it exists, have passed from death unto life. And this proof exists whether perceived by him who is the subject of this love, or not perceived. But every Christian loves the brethren; and that from the moment in which he becomes a Christian. Every Christian, therefore, has actually passed from death unto life. This, however, cannot be true, unless every Christian perseveres in holiness unto the end. Every Christian does therefore persevere.

Being confident, says St. Paul, *of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* The word here rendered *perform,* signifies *to finish,* or *complete.* St. Paul was confident, therefore, that the Spirit of God, who had begun a good work, *viz.* the work of sanctification, in the Philippian Christians, would continue to complete it by various steps, until it was brought to perfection. But St. Paul, under the influence of inspiration, could not mistake concerning this subject. His confidence was founded in truth. The work begun in the Philippian Christians, *was completed.* Of course it will be completed in all other Christians.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, says our Saviour, *He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that hath sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is* (hath) *passed from death unto life.* John v. 24. In this passage it is declared, that *he that heareth the word of Christ, and believeth on him, by whom he was sent, has passed from death unto life.* What is meant by this phrase is also decisively explained, when it is said, "Every such person hath everlasting life;" and when it is farther said, "he

shall not come into condemnation." But every Christian, *when he becomes a Christian*, hears the words of Christ, and believes on him that sent him. Therefore, every Christian has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but has already passed from death unto life.

Declarations of the same import abound in the Scriptures. It cannot be necessary to multiply quotations any farther. If these are not believed, none will be believed.

6thly. *The doctrine against which I contend, is inconsistent with many scriptural promises.*

Such a promise is contained in the passage last recited. *He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, shall not come into condemnation.*

Another is contained in the following words, John vi. 37, *Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out.* Every Christian *has come to Christ*, in the very sense of this passage. Should he then be rejected afterward, he would be as really cast out as if rejected at first; and the promise would not be performed.

Another example of the same nature is found in Mark xvi. 16; *He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.* Every Christian has believed: every Christian will therefore be saved.

Another is found in John x. 27, 28. *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

Another in the 9th verse of the same chapter: *I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.*

All these are promises, uttered by Christ himself; and it will not be denied, that he understood the import of his own promise, nor that he will faithfully perform it to the uttermost.

Finally, St. Paul has declared his views concerning this subject in a manner which one would expect to terminate the controversy. *Moreover*, says this apostle, *whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.* This is both a declaration and a promise; and in both respects is unconditional and universal. In the most express language it asserts, that every one who is effectu-

ally called, is justified, and will in the end be glorified also. But every Christian is thus called.

I shall now proceed to consider the principal objections against the perseverance of Christians.

1st. *It is objected, that this doctrine is inconsistent with free agency.*

This objection, as to its real import, I have had occasion to consider in several preceding discourses. If the answers made to it then were just and sufficient, they must admit of a satisfactory application to this subject. The drift of the objection in every case is against the doctrine, that God can create a free agent who shall yet be a holy being. If he can create such an agent, and make him holy from the beginning; he can undoubtedly, with equal ease, and equal consistency, render such an agent holy after he is created. But it cannot be scripturally denied, that our first parents, or the angels, were created holy; nor that the man, Jesus Christ, was created holy. Nor can it be denied, that all these were in the fullest sense free agents. The very acknowledgment that they were holy, is an acknowledgment that they were free agents; for holiness is an attribute of free agents only. It is certain, then, that God can render such agents holy, at any time after they are created, without infringing at all the freedom of their agency. In other words, he can regenerate them; can sanctify them afterward, at successive periods; and can, of course, continually increase their holiness to the end of their lives.

Farther: Angels and glorified saints will persevere in holiness throughout eternity; and their perseverance is rendered absolutely certain by the unchangeable promise of God. Yet neither this perseverance, nor the certainty of it, will at all diminish the freedom of their agency. The perseverance of saints in this world may therefore exist to the end of life, and may be absolutely certain without any diminution of the freedom of their agency.

2dly. *It is alleged, that the Scriptures promise eternal life to Christians conditionally; and that this is inconsistent with the supposition, that every Christian will certainly persevere in holiness.* For example: *He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved:* and again; *For we are made par-*

takers with Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.

There are many passages of this nature in the New Testament. As the import of them all is exactly the same, it will be unnecessary to quote any more. Their universal tenor, whether given in the form of promises, cautions, exhortations, or commands, is this; that eternal life will not be allotted to any of mankind, except those who continue in obedience unto the end. Hence it is argued, that a discrimination is here intentionally made between such Christians as do, and such as do not, thus continue in their obedience. Otherwise, it is observed, the condition would be useless, and without any foundation in fact.

To this I answer, first, that a conditional promise collateral to an absolute one, can never affect, much less make void, the absolute promise. The promises which I have recited of eternal life to every Christian are all absolute; as are also many others of the same nature. They cannot, therefore, be made void by these conditional ones.

Secondly, it is still true, that none but those who endure to the end will be saved; and equally true, that every Christian will endure to the end.

It is elsewhere said in the Scriptures, that if we *do not believe, we shall be damned;* that *if we do not repent, we shall perish;* that *if we do not love the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be anathema; that without holiness no man shall see the Lord;* that *he who hateth his brother abideth in death;* and that *without love we are nothing.* From these passages it might with the same force be concluded, that some persons believe who do not repent; that some repent who are not holy; and that some are holy, who yet hate their brethren; and that thus a discrimination was intended to be made between believing Christians and penitent ones, and between both these and such as are holy. The truth is, every Christian does all these things. These several descriptions were given, partly to shew us the whole nature of Christianity; partly to teach us *all our duty;* partly to shew us, that all of it is indispensable; and partly to furnish us with useful and necessary evidence of our Christian character.

At the same time all these conditional promises and exhortations, are and were intended to be powerful means of

the very perseverance which is the principal subject of them. We are not constrained or forced to persevere; nor should we, on the other hand, persevere, were we wholly left to ourselves. Our perseverance is owing to two great causes; the influence of the Spirit of God on our hearts, and the various means furnished in the word, ordinances, and providence, of God, accompanied with the divine blessing upon the use of them. Among these means, the very condition, here suggested in so many impressive forms, is of high importance; and has contributed to the perseverance of Christians in holiness ever since the Scriptures were published. Although, therefore, all Christians actually thus persevere; yet it is not improbable that without the aid of those passages of Scripture here alluded to, multitudes might have fallen away. Christians have no other satisfactory knowledge of their Christianity, except their continuance in obedience. The earnest desire of possessing this knowledge on the one hand, and the fear of being found destitute of the Christian character on the other, cannot but serve as powerful motives (motives too powerful in my view, to be safely omitted in the scriptural system) to produce in the Christian perseverance in holiness.

3dly. *It is objected, that this doctrine naturally contributes to lessen the diligence of the Christian in his duty.*

For an answer to this objection I must refer you to the observations, made in a former discourse on the same objection to the doctrine of *justification by faith.* In that discourse the objection was applied to the doctrine now under consideration; and if I mistake not was satisfactorily obviated.

4thly. *It is objected, that several passages of Scripture teach the contrary doctrine.*

Among these is Heb. ii. 4—8, *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened; and have tasted of the heavenly gift; and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost; and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh upon it, and bringeth forth herb meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing*

from God; but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected; and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.

It will be unnecessary for me to determine here who are the persons meant by the apostle in this passage. *He himself has decided that they are not Christians.* Their character is fully expressed in the eighth verse, under the image of *the earth, which beareth thorns and briers; while that of Christians is expressed in the seventh verse, under the image of the earth, which bringeth forth herbs, meet for them by whom it is dressed.* These are here studiously contrasted. The character of the former is therefore exhibited by the apostle as a direct contrast to that of Christians; who it is to be remembered are represented every where in the Scriptures as bringing forth good fruit. This passage then teaches nothing opposed to the doctrine which I am endeavouring to support.

Secondly, *It is not asserted by the apostle, that those of whom he speaks ever actually fall away.* The case is stated only in the form of a supposition, and he declares only, that should they fall away, there is no possibility of renewing them unto repentance. Whether such persons do in fact fall away is therefore left uncertain.

Should it be thought, that the expressions in this passage amount to a description of Christianity; and that therefore Christians are meant in it: I answer, that neither of the expressions taken separately, nor all of them together, involve any necessary description of Christianity. It is true that Christians sustain all these characteristics except two: viz. *partaking of the Holy Ghost, and the powers of the world to come;* μελλοντος αιωνος, *the future age,* that is, the period of the Christian dispensation thus denominated. These phrases indicate the miraculous powers possessed by many Christians when this passage was written, but never belonging to Christians as such. They therefore denote no part of Christianity. Judas possessed these characteristics. The remaining expressions are all indefinite: and as truly applicable to men, who still continuing to be sinners, have enjoyed peculiar Christian advantages, as they can be to Christians. The whole drift of this passage, therefore, even when construed most favourably for those whom oppose, is only ambiguously in favour of them.

trine; and is in my view decided against them by the apostle himself. But it cannot be rationally believed, that a doctrine of this importance would, in opposition to so many clear, decisive declarations, have been left to expressions merely ambiguous.

Another passage, pleaded for the same purpose, is the declaration of Christ, John xvii. 12, *Those whom thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.* To discover the true meaning of this passage, we need only recur to other declarations of the same glorious person. *Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.* The widow of Sarepta is here, by the very same phraseology included among *the widows of Israel;* as Judas was included among those *that were given to Christ.* Yet we know, and this passage declares, that she was not an Israelitish, but a Sidonian, widow: and we know equally well, that Judas was never given to Christ, as a Christian.

Again, *There were many lepers in Israel, in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them were cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.* Naaman the Syrian was not an Israelitish leper; though, in the first apparent meaning of the passage, mentioned as such. Judas was not given to Christ, although apparently mentioned as thus given. The whole meaning of this phrase would be completely expressed thus: *Those whom thou gavest me have I kept; and none of them is lost: but the son of perdition is lost.*

That Judas was never given to Christ we know from his whole history, and the repeated declarations of his Master. This passage therefore has not even a remote reference to the subject in debate.

Another passage of the same nature is that, 1 Tim. i. 19. *Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away, concerning faith, have made shipwreck.* The meaning of this passage may be easily learned from a correct translation. *Holding fast faith,* faithfulness or fidelity, *and a good conscience; which some,* that is, some teachers, *having cast away concerning the faith,* περι την πιστιν, that is, *the doctrines of the gospel, have made shipwreck.*

Generally it may be observed, that the doctrine against

which I contend, is not supported in a single, unequivocal declaration of the Scriptures. I know of none in which it is asserted in terms so favourable to it as those which I have considered. Whatever is said concerning the apostacy of any Christian professors, is decisively explained by St. John. *They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.*

REMARKS.

1st. *The faithfulness of God is highly conspicuous in the truths which have been now discussed.*

Christians provoke God daily; and awaken his anger against themselves more and more continually. By every sin they persuade him, if I may be allowed the expression, to desert them, and to give them up to themselves. Still he preserves them from destruction. He has promised them life. He has established *his covenant* with them *for an everlasting covenant;* and *it shall never be forgotten.* On his immutability their safety stands immoveable. In this manner is it exhibited by himself. *For I,* saith he, *am* JEHOVAH: *I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.* This attribute is the seal, the certainty, of every promise: and *sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or one tittle of* that which is promised *shall fail.*

2dly. *From these observations we learn, that the promises of the gospel are absolutely necessary for the hope and support of Christians.*

Christians, in their very best estate, possess such a character as, to say the most, furnishes a very feeble and distant hope of their perseverance in holiness, and their final success in obtaining salvation. In better language, if left to themselves, there is no rational hope, that they would ever arrive at the kingdom of heaven. If God did not preserve them, they would fall daily, certainly, and finally. Without the promises of God, prone as Christians are to backslide, they would feel no confidence in their own success; but would sink into despondency and despair. To preserve them from this despondency, and the ruin which would result from it, God has filled his word with promises,

which yield solid and sufficient support, consolation, hope, and joy. On these they rest safely, and cannot be moved.

3dly. *We here learn that the Christian life is a life far removed from gloom.*

Many persons hearing often of the self-denial, repentance, and mortification of sin, connected with Christianity, have supposed a life of religion to be only gloomy and discouraging; and have thus dreaded it, as destitute of all present enjoyment. In this opinion they have been confirmed by the sad countenances, demure behaviour, and cheerless lives, of some who have professed themselves Christians. All this however is remote from the true character of religion. Real Christianity furnishes the fairest and most abundant enjoyment. It is delightful in itself; and, when not the immediate object of persecution, finds every where comforts, friends, and blessings. In God the Christian finds a sure, an ever-present, an everlasting friend; in Christ, a Saviour from sin and sorrow; in the divine promises, an indefeasible inheritance of unceasing and eternal good.

Let none, therefore, particularly let not those who are young, and who are easily deterred from approaching that which wears a forbidding aspect, be hindered from becoming religious by any apprehended gloominess in religion, or any sorrowful deportment of those who profess to be Christians. Christianity is but another name for joy. It can spread a smile even over this melancholy world, and lend delightful consolation to suffering and to sorrow. All its dictates, all its emotions, all its views, are cheerful, serene, and supporting. Here it is safe; hereafter it will triumph. Sin only is misery. Sinners in this world have a thousand sufferings of which the good man is ignorant; and, in the world to come, will lie down in eternal sorrow.

SERMON LXXXVIII.

EVIDENCES OF REGENERATION. WHAT ARE NOT EVIDENCES.

Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith: prove your ownselves; know ye not your ownselves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?—2 COR. XIII. 5.

HAVING in a long series of discourses considered the doctrine of regeneration, its antecedents, attendants, and consequents; I shall now proceed to another interesting subject of theology; viz. *the evidences of regeneration.*

In the text, the apostle commands the Corinthian Christians *to examine and prove themselves;* and states the purpose of this examination to be to determine *whether they were in the faith.* He then inquires of them, *Know ye not your ownselves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?* in the original, *except ye be* ἀδοκιμοι, *unapproved;* unable to endure the trial of such an examination. From this passage of Scripture it is plain, that it was the duty of the Corinthians *to examine themselves concerning their Christian character;* and that *this examination was to be pursued by them so thoroughly, as to prove, so far as might be, whether they were, or were not, in the faith; whether Christ did, or did not, dwell in them by his Holy Spirit.*

That which was the duty of the Corinthians, is the duty of all other Christians. That which is the duty of all Christians, it is the duty of every minister to aid them in performing. To unfold *the evidences of religion in the heart* is therefore, at times, the duty of every minister; and to learn them, that of every Christian.

In attempting to perform this duty at the present time, I shall endeavour to point out,

I. *Some of the imaginary evidences of religion;*

II. *Some of its real evidences;* and

III. *Some of the difficulties which attend the application of the real evidences of religion to ourselves.*

I. *I shall endeavour to point out some of the imaginary evidences of religion.*

By *imaginary evidences* I intend, *those which are sometimes supposed to be proofs of its existence, but have this character through mistake only:* evidences which may be, and often are, found in the hearts and lives both of the saint and the sinner: things on which it is dangerous to rely, because they do not evince, in any degree, either a holy or an unholy character. It will not be expected, that I should enter into a minute and detailed account of a subject, which has occupied formal treatises, and filled volumes. Considerations of particular importance can alone find a place in such a system of discourses. To them, therefore, I shall confine myself; and even these I must necessarily discuss in a summary manner. With these preliminary remarks, I observe,

1st. *That nothing in the time, place, manner, or other circumstances, of a supposed conversion, furnishes, ordinarily, any solid evidence, that it is, or is not, real.*

It is not uncommon for persons, and for Christians among others, to dwell, both in their thoughts and conversation, on these subjects; and to believe, that they furnish them with comforting proofs of their piety. Some persons rest not a little on their consciousness of *the time*, at which they believe themselves to have turned to God. So confident are they with regard to this subject, that they boldly appeal to it in their conversation with others, as evidence of their regeneration. "So many years since," one of them will say, "my heart closed with Christ. Christ was discovered to my soul. The arm of mercy laid hold on me. I was stopped in the career of iniquity. I received totally new views of divine things." Much other language, of a similar nature, is used by them; all of which rests ultimately on their knowledge of the time at which they suppose themselves to have become the subjects of the renewing grace of God.

There is reason to believe, derived however from other sources, that these apprehensions may sometimes be found in truth; in other instances there is abundant proof that they are founded in falsehood. But that which may easily be either false or true, as in the present case it plainly may,

can never safely be made the ground of reliance, especially in a concern of such moment.

Other persons appeal with the same confidence to *the manner and circumstances* of their supposed conversion as evidences of its reality. Thus one recites with much reliance the strong convictions of sin under which he was distressed for a length of time; the deep sense which he had of deserving the anger and punishment of God; his disposition readily to acknowledge the justice of the divine law in condemning him, and of the divine government in punishing him; his full belief that he was among the worst of sinners; and the state of despair to which he was brought under the apprehension of his guilt. Of all these things it may be observed, that although convictions of sin, generally of the nature here referred to, always precede regeneration, yet in whatever form or degree they exist they are not regeneration: they cannot, therefore, be proofs of regeneration. He who has them, in whatever manner he has them, will, if he proceed no farther, be still *in the gall of bitterness.*

But the same person perhaps goes on farther, and declares that while he was in this situation of distress, when he was ready to give himself up for lost, God discovered himself to him as a reconciled God, and filled his mind with new, sudden, and unspeakable joy; that he had a strong and delightful sense of the divine mercy in Jesus Christ, of the wonderful compassion of Christ in consenting to die for sinners, in being willing to accept of sinners, and particularly in being willing to accept of so great a sinner as himself; that he found his heart going forth in love to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to the word and ordinances of God, and to the church of Christ; and that this state of mind was new to him, being constituted of emotions which he never felt before. On these things, therefore, he reposes as supporting evidences that he is a Christian.

All this is in my own view a just account of what really takes place in the conversion of multitudes; and did it exist in no other case, would undoubtedly furnish the very evidence here relied on without any sufficient warrant. The defect in this scheme lies in the fact, that these very

emotions are experienced by multitudes who are not Christians. That a person who has been the subject of extreme distress under convictions of sin and the fear of perdition, should, whenever he begins to hope that his sins are forgiven and his soul secured from destruction, experience lively emotions of joy, is to be expected as a thing of course; and *that*, whether his hopes are evangelical or false. All men must rejoice in their deliverance from destruction, whether truly or erroneously believed by them; and all men who have had a distressing sense of their guilt and danger, will, under a sense of such a deliverance, experience intense emotions of joy. All men also, who really believe that God is become their friend, will love him. All will love the word of God, who consider it as speaking peace and salvation to themselves. This joy and this love, it is evident, are merely natural, and are felt of course by every mistaken professor of religion. Love to God and to divine things is *a delight in the nature of these objects*, independently of any personal benefit to which we feel entitled from them.

Another person places confidence in the *greatness of the effects* which his sense of sin and his hope of forgiveness produced both on his body and mind. He will inform you, with plain consolation to himself, that his distressing apprehensions of his guilt sunk him in the dust, and caused him to cry out involuntarily; deprived him of his strength, and for a time perhaps of the clear exercise of his reason, caused him to swoon, and almost terminated his life. Much the same effects, he will also observe, were produced in him by his consequent discoveries of the divine mercy. These overwhelmed him with transport; as his convictions did with agony. The extraordinary nature, and especially the extraordinary degree, of these emotions, furnishes this man with the most consolatory proof that he is a child of God.

On this I shall only observe, that as these emotions may be and often are excited by natural as well as evangelical causes, so when thus excited they may exist in any supposable degree. The agonies and the transports, the agitations of body and of mind, prove indeed the *intensity* of the feelings experienced; but they do not in the least

degree exhibit either their *nature* or their *cause*, and cannot therefore be safely relied on as evidences of religion.

A third person will tell you, that while he was in a state of absolute carelessness, and going on headlong in sin, *he was suddenly alarmed concerning his guilt and danger by a passage of Scripture which came to his mind in a moment; without any thought or contrivance of his own;* and perhaps that *after he had long wearied himself to find an escape from the wrath of God, another text of Scripture, also without any contrivance of his own, came as suddenly to his mind, conveying to him bright views of the divine mercy and glorious promises of salvation.* The reliance of this man is placed especially on the fact, *that these texts came to his mind without any effort on his part either to remember or to search after them.* He therefore concludes, that they were communicated to him directly by the Spirit of God, and that they conveyed to him a direct personal promise of eternal life. This is mere delusion. Passages of Scripture, and those just such as are here referred to, come often suddenly, and without any labour of theirs, to the minds of multitudes who are not Christians; and God is no more immediately concerned in bringing them to the mind in this case, than when we read them in the Bible or hear them from the desk. What God speaks in the Bible he always speaks, and speaks to *us;* but he addresses nothing to *us* when we *remember*, any more than when we *read* or *hear* his words. If we rely on the true import of what he says, we rely with perfect safety; but if we place any importance on the *mode* in which at any time that which is said comes to our minds, we deceive ourselves. The whole of our recollection in these cases is a merely natural process, and is the result of that association of ideas by which memory is chiefly governed, and which brings to our remembrance, *in the very same manner*, thousands of other things, as well as these texts of Scripture, of which however, as being of little importance to us, we take no notice.

Other persons depend much on *the regularity of the process* with which their distresses and consolations have existed; and *in the conformity of them to such a scheme and history of these things*, as they have found in books, or re-

ceived from the mouth of acknowledged and eminent Christians. In the sermon on the antecedents of regeneration I observed, that *this work is in its process almost endlessly various.* But in whatever manner it exists, the manner itself is of no consequence. Should we have exactly the same succession of distresses and consolations experienced by ever so many of the most distinguished saints, and yet our affections, instead of being evangelical, be merely natural, the order of their existence could never prove that we were Christians; for we should still be sinners. The *nature* of these affections, and not *the order,* is the great concern of all our self-examination.

2dly. *Zeal in the cause of religion, is no evidence that we are, or are not, Christians.*

Men, we all know, are capable of exercising zeal in any case, in proportion to the degree of interest which they feel in that case. We also know, that there is *a zeal which is not according to knowledge.* All persons naturally ardent, become zealous about every thing in which they are once engaged; and especially when they are opposed. *Christians* are zealous in the cause of *religion: Deists* and *Atheists,* in the cause of *Infidelity: Jews,* in that of *Judaism: Heathens,* in that of *Idolatry.* The *Ephesians* were zealous for the worship of the great goddess *Diana: St. Paul* and his companions, for that of the true God: *the Anabaptists* at *Munster,* for the wild reveries taught by their leaders: and thus concerning innumerable others. Nothing is more evident, than that zeal was not in most of these cases any proof of piety in those by whom it was exercised.

As *zeal itself, so the degree in which it exists,* is no proof of vital religion. There have been multitudes of persons, *whose zeal has prompted them to court persecution.* It is not uncommon for members of small and despised sects to believe, that *the sufferance of persecution is a decisive characteristic of the true church of God;* and to solicit it as decisive evidence that they themselves are members of this church. With these views, they sedulously construe all the kinds and degrees of opposition with which they meet into persecution. In this manner they regard the sober argumentation with which their opinions are refuted; the most dispassionate exposures of their folly and their faults;

the most just operations of law, directed either against their crimes, or to the preservation of the rights of others; nay, even that abstinence from communion with them in their worship, and that refusal to further their designs, which they, on their own part, claim as indefeasible rights of man. Such persons ought to remember, that all, or nearly all, classes of Christians, even those whom they most oppose, nay, that infidels and atheists, have been persecuted, and that the modern Jews have been more persecuted than any other sect, party, or people, now in existence. The sufferance of persecution, therefore, is no proof that we belong to the true church. Still more ought they to remember, that St. Paul hath said, *Though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.*

3dly. *No exactness in performing the external duties of religion, furnishes any evidence that we are, or are not, Christians.*

Few persons have been more exact in this respect than the ancient Pharisees. Yet Christ has testified of them, that they were *a generation of vipers.* Under the Christian dispensation great multitudes of the Roman Catholics, notoriously profligate in many parts of their conduct, have, in various periods of Popery, been remarkably punctilious in the performance of these duties. That which was no evidence of Christianity in *them,* cannot be evidence of Christianity in *ourselves.*

Many persons are exact in this conduct from the influence of education and example; many, from habit; many, from the desire of religious distinction; many, because they think this conduct a proof of their piety, and are uneasy without such proof; many, because they think themselves in this way only in the safe path to salvation: and many, from other selfish reasons. In all these things, considered by themselves, there is no religion. Of course the conduct to which they give birth cannot be evidential of religion.

4thly. *No exactness in performing those which are frequently called moral duties, furnishes any evidence of this nature.*

Multitudes of mankind place great confidence in their careful performance of *these* external duties, as being evi-

dential of their evangelical character; just as other multitudes do in *those* mentioned under the preceding head, and with no better foundation.

Justice, truth, and kindness, in their various branches and operations, are so important and useful to mankind, that we all readily agree in giving them high distinction in the scale of moral characteristics. Those who practise them uniformly and extensively are universally considered as benefactors to the world, and as invested with peculiar amiableness and worth. Those who violate them, on the other hand, are, from the mischiefs which they produce, regarded as enemies and nuisances to the human race. At the same time a high degree of importance is given to these duties in the Scriptures. They are greatly insisted on in the gospel; inculcated in many forms of instruction; commended in the most forcible language; and encouraged by most interesting promises. The violation of them is condemned and threatened in the most pungent terms, and under the most glowing images.

It cannot be surprising that, influenced by these considerations, parents should make these duties a prime part of their instructions and precepts to their children. But when we remember, that the practice of them has in all ages, and in all civilized countries, been considered as equally and as indispensably necessary to a fair reputation, and to success in the common business of life; we shall readily suppose, that these must be among the first things imbibed by the early mind from parental superintendence, and must hold a peculiar importance in all the future thoughts of the man.

Thus taught, and thus imbibed, we should naturally expect to see them practised, during the progress of life, as extensively as can consist with the imperfect character of human beings. When thus practised, and especially when eminently practised, we cannot wonder to find those, whose lives they adorn, regarded as persons of real virtue and excellence. What less can be expected? These are the very actions, towards our fellow-creatures, required by God himself, and dictated by evangelical virtue; a part of the very fruits by which the Christian character is to be known. Why is not he, who exhibits them, a Christian? Oftentimes

also they appear with high advantage in the conduct of persons, distinguished by natural sweetness of disposition, peculiar decency of character, amiableness of life, and dignity or gracefulness of manners; and thus become delightful objects to the eye, and excite the warmest commendations of the tongue. It is not strange therefore that they should have gained a high and established reputation; and should be extensively regarded as unequivocal proofs of an excellent character.

What others so generally attribute to them we not unnaturally accord with, whenever our own case is concerned; and finding, that we are believed by others to be Christians, on account of our good works of this nature, readily believe ourselves to possess the character. We are esteemed, loved, and commended, by those around us; and cannot easily believe, that the worth, which they attribute to us, is all imaginary.

Still, such a performance of these duties furnishes no proof that we are Christians. *For*, in the first place, *they may be, and often are, all performed from the very motives mentioned under the last head, as being frequently the sources of exactness in the external duties of religion.* Secondly, *they are often performed by men who violate extensively or grossly neglect the duties of piety and temperance, and who therefore are certainly not Christians.* Thirdly, *they appear to have been all performed with uncommon exactness by the young man who came to Christ to inquire what good thing he should do to have eternal life.* Yet, *he lacked one thing;* and that was *the one thing needful.*

5thly. *No degrees of sorrow or comfort, of fear or hope, experienced by any person about his religious concerns, at seasons, succeeding the time of his supposed conversion, furnish any evidence of this nature.*

Sorrow springs from many sources, beside a sense of our sins; and from such a sense it may be derived, and yet not be *the sorrow which is after a godly sort.* We may easily and greatly sorrow for our sins, because we consider them as exposing us to the anger of God, and to everlasting ruin. Our comforts also may flow from other sources, beside those which are evangelical. Some persons derive great consolation, and even exquisite joy, from a belief, that,

whether well or ill founded, of their acceptance with God: some, from the apprehension, that they are eminent Christians: some, from the unexpected influx of religious thoughts, and passages of Scripture, coming suddenly into their minds: some, from what they esteem peculiar tokens of divine goodness to them; tokens, which they regard as proofs of the peculiar love and favour of God: some, from what they term peculiar discoveries of the glory of God, and the excellency of the Redeemer, and of the joys of the blessed in heaven. All these they consider as immediately communicated by God to themselves, because they are his favourites among mankind. There are also other states of mind, in which consolations are experienced from other sources: consolations, which may exist in high degrees, but which are too numerous to be mentioned at the present time.

What is true of the sorrows and comforts excited by religious consideration, is substantially true of the kindred emotions of fear and hope. These can also arise both from true and false apprehensions; and can be either merely natural, or wholly evangelical, or of a mixed nature. As they actually exist in the minds of men, they are, to say the least, often undistinguished, as to their real nature, by those in whom they exist, and are, I believe, many times in a great measure undistinguishable. Their existence is so transient, they are frequently mingled with so many other views and emotions, and the eye of the mind is often so engaged by the objects which give birth to them, that it becomes extremely difficult to fasten upon their true character.

6thly. *No evidence of our sanctification is furnished by our own confidence.*

The truth of this declaration may be easily seen in the fact, that multitudes feel the utmost confidence, that they are Christians, who afterward prove, by their conduct, their entire destitution of Christianity. All enthusiasts usually confide with undoubting assurance in the reality of their own religion; and generally pity, and often despise, men of an humbler and a better spirit; because they do not enjoy such peculiar discoveries, such delightful exercises of devotion, such bright hopes and heavenly anticipations of future glory,

as themselves. The Pharisee boldly said, *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men, or even as this publican.* Yet he was a worse man than the publican. A collection of the Pharisees said to Christ, *Are we blind also?*

I propose hereafter to consider, at some length, what is commonly called *the faith of assurance.* It will be sufficient to observe, at the present time, that I believe some men to be really and evangelically thus assured. If this be admitted, as it undoubtedly will be by the great body of Christians, it follows of course, that confidence in our good estate is no proof that we are not Christians. A man may confide, with sufficient evidence: he may also confide without it. It is plain therefore that his confidence, considered by itself, furnishes no proof, that it is well or ill founded.

I cannot, however, do justice to my own views, nor, as I believe, to the subject, without observing here, that in ordinary cases, I entertain a better opinion of the modest, doubting, fearful professor, than of the bold and assured one. The life of the former, as it seems to me, is commonly, at least, more watchful; more careful; more self-condemning; more scrupulous concerning the commission of sin, and the omission of duty; more indicative of dependance on God; more inclined to *esteem others better than himself;* more declaratory of the spirit of *little children.* The spirit of the latter, even when he is admitted to be a Christian, appears to me to be often fraught, in an unhappy degree, with self-exaltation; with censoriousness, as well as contempt, of those who differ from him; with uncharitableness; with peremptoriness of opinion; and with an unwarrantable assurance of the rectitude of whatever he believes, says, or does. These, certainly, are not favourable specimens of any character. I would be far from ultimately condemning the profession of all those, in whom these things are more or less visible; yet I assert, without hesitation, that their *light* would *shine* more clearly *before men,* were it not obscured by these clouds.

It is not *the degree* of confidence, but the *grace whence it is derived, and the objects on which it rests* by which its nature and import are to be determined. It may exist in the highest degree, without any religion; and religion may exist in very high degrees at least without any confidence.

7thly. *The belief of others, that we are Christians, furnishes no proof of our Christianity.*

All persons, who make a profession of religion, and many who do not, whose lives at the same time are exemplary, scrupulous, and unblamable, are by most charitable persons believed to be Christians. Some of these, however, beyond any reasonable doubt, are not Christians. Some we know to have lived in this manner, and to have sustained this character, both in ancient and modern times without a pretension to vital religion. Judas was believed by his fellow-apostles, for a length of time, and not improbably without a single doubt, to be a true follower of Christ. Hymenæus and Philetus appear to have sustained the same character; and, apparently, with as little foundation. All these were believed to be Christians *by apostles;* inspired men; of singular understanding in subjects of this nature. Yet *these* men were deceived. No words are necessary to prove, that *we,* and *all others,* are liable to deception in similar cases. If the belief of Peter and Paul, that *the objects of their charity,* in the cases specified, were Christians, was no evidence of *their* Christianity; then the belief of others, that *we* are Christians, is no evidence of *our* Christianity.

REMARKS.

From these observations we learn,

1st. *That we ought to exercise the utmost care and caution in examining the evidences of our own religion.*

How many professors of Christianity have considered the things which I have specified as decisive proofs that themselves were good men! Yet, if I mistake not, it has been clearly shewn that all of them united, furnish no solid evidence of this fact. *We* are just as liable to be deceived as *others;* and unless peculiarly guarded by the very same means. Others have rested their hopes of salvation on these things, as proofs of their religious character, and have been deceived. If *we* rest on them, we shall be deceived also: for we may possess all these things, and yet not be Christians. In a case of this moment, nothing ought voluntarily to be left at hazard. We are bound by our own supreme interest, as well as our duty to God, to fulfil the

command of the text; to *examine, and to prove ourselves, whether we be in the faith;* and in doing this, to make use of the best means in our power; to fasten, with as much care as possible, on those things which the Scriptures have made tests of a religious character; and earnestly to pray to God, that we may not be deceived, either by ourselves or by any others.

2dly. *From the same source we learn also, the impropriety and folly of making these things the foundation of our judgment concerning the religious character of others.*

Whenever we determine, that others are or are not Christians, because they exhibit these as evidences of their Christianity; we are plainly liable to gross error concerning this subject. All these things may be truly testified concerning himself *by a Christian;* and with equal truth by *a person destitute of Christianity.* They are therefore no proofs of his religion or irreligion.

Still a great multitude of professing Christians, many of whom I doubt not are really Christians; and all or nearly all, enthusiastic professors; make these very things, or the want of them, the foundations of their favourable or unfavourable opinions of the religious character of others. They resort to them, as to an acknowledged and scriptural standard, which they do not expect to find disputed; and to question which would not improbably be regarded by them as a proof of irreligion.

What is still more unhappy; among various classes of Christians in this country, these very things, particularly those mentioned under the first, second, and fifth heads of this discourse; are, if I am not misinformed, not unfrequently made the objects of a public examination of candidates for admission to Christian communion, and the foundations of a public judgment concerning their religious character. To be able to remember the time when convictions of sin began, with their attendant distresses, and the time when they were followed by hopes, consolations, and joys; to have had these occasioned by the sudden, uncontrived, and unexpected influx of certain passages of Scripture into the mind; especially, if, according to a pre-established and acknowledged scheme of regeneration among themselves, these things have taken place in a certain order, [illegible]

sion; still more especially, if the sorrows and consolations have risen very high; and most of all, if they are succeeded by distinguished zeal about things pertaining to religion; are boldly pronounced ample evidence of the candidate's piety. In this manner, there is reason to fear, multitudes are miserably led astray, both by being introduced *beforehand* to labour, that these things may be truly said of themselves; and by settling down in a state of security on this false foundation *afterward*.

Nor is the case less unhappy, when persons rest their hopes on their exactness in performing the external duties of religion and morality. Yet vast numbers of mankind repose themselves on these, as on a bed of down; and feel satisfied, that God will not finally condemn persons, who have laboured so much in his service. All of them will, however, find in the end, that to such as have done all this, and nothing more, *one thing is lacking:* viz. an interest in Christ; a thing without which they cannot be saved.

3dly. *We see the danger of being strongly confident in the piety of ourselves or others.*

All, or nearly all, such confidence, so far as I have observed, has been derived from these supposed evidences of religion; any part, or the whole, of which may be possessed by men totally destitute of Christianity. It is a fatal mark on them all, that the Scriptures have no where alleged them as proofs of religion. As they are not scriptural proofs, they cannot be sound. To trust in them is to trust in a nullity. Accordingly, those who give the fairest proofs of Christianity in their life and conversation, never make these things the foundation of their hope; and are very rarely found to be strongly confident of their acceptance with God.

To pronounce boldly that others are Christians, is, in many cases at least, equally hazardous. There are many persons, however, who roundly declare others, of whose life they have had little or no knowledge, to be Christians; and others not to be Christians, whose conduct and conversation, give them at least as fair, and often fairer, claims to this character. Nay, they will peremptorily make these assertions concerning ministers of the gospel; and pro-

nounce some to be sanctified, and others unsanctified, from a sermon or a prayer; or even from the tones of voice with which they are uttered. *Judge not*, saith our Saviour, *that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. Who art thou*, saith St. Paul, *that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.* It is sufficient, to shew the impropriety and rashness of these unwarrantable decisions, that they are founded on no scriptural or solid evidence. They are generally built on the very things exploded in this discourse, or others of less importance; all of which, united, go not a single step towards proving a religious or an irreligious character.

SERMON LXXXIX.

EVIDENCES OF REGENERATION. WHAT ARE REAL EVIDENCES.

Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your ownselves; know ye not your ownselves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?—2 COR. XIII. 5.

IN the last discourse, I attempted to point out *several things which furnish no real evidence of regeneration, although they have been supposed to furnish it by multitudes in the Christian world.* I now propose to mention *several other things which actually furnish such evidence.*

By all who believe the doctrine of regeneration, as formerly taught in these discourses, it must be admitted, that the disposition communicated when this work is accomplished in us is *new*; and something which before did not exist in the soul. If it were the mere increase or some other modification of the former disposition, it could not be said *to be born again, to be created anew, to be a new creature, to be renewed in the spirit of his mind.* It could

not be said by St. Paul concerning persons who were the subjects of regeneration, that *old things were passed away in them, and* that *all things had become new.*

It must farther be acknowledged, that this new disposition is, in its nature, opposite to that which before existed in the mind. The former disposition is *sin;* condemned and punished by the law of God: the new disposition is *holiness;* required and rewarded by the same law. The former disposition is hateful in the sight of God: the new one lovely and *of great price.*

The former disposition is frequently and justly styled *selfishness;* as being perpetually employed in subordinating the interests of any and all others to the private personal interests of the individual in whom it prevails. The new disposition is, with the same propriety, styled *disinterestedness, love, good-will, benevolence,* a spirit inclining him, in whom it exists, to subordinate his own private interest to the general welfare, and to find his own happiness in the common prosperity of the divine kingdom. The part, the place, and the enjoyments, which God assigns to him as a member of this kingdom, he is inclined to take, not with submission only, but with cheerfulness; as being that which is ordered by infinite wisdom, and is therefore the best and most desirable.

This new disposition is also opposed to the former, particularly as it regards our Maker. The former, or *carnal mind, is enmity against God;* opposed to his character and to his pleasure: the new one is conformed to his pleasure and delighted with his character. He in whom it exists, *delights in the law of God after the inner man; and esteems it as more to be chosen than the most fine gold, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.*

The former disposition is an impenitent devotion to sin; attended at times, and after some of its grosser perpetrations, by remorse perhaps, and self-condemnation; but never by a loathing of the sin itself, nor by that ingenuous *sorrow* for it *which is after a godly sort.* The new disposition is a real hatred of sin; a sincere, and, if I may so term it, an instinctive sorrow for every transgression of the divine commands, whenever such transgression is present to the view of the mind.

The former disposition was a general spirit of unbelief, or distrust towards God, his invitations, promises, and designs: a distrust especially exercised towards the Redeemer, and towards his righteousness as the foundation of our acceptance with God. The new one is an humble, a steadfast, affectionate confidence in God, his declarations and designs; exercised particularly towards Christ, as the Saviour of mankind, the propitiation for sin, and the true and living way to eternal glory. This confidence, or, as it is most usually termed in the New Testament, this *faith*, is a vital principle in the soul, producing every act of real obedience; every act in man which is pleasing to God.

In all these particulars, united, the new disposition is termed *godliness*, or *piety*.

The former disposition is inclined to the indulgence of those lusts, or passions and appetites, which immediately respect ourselves; such as pride, vanity, sloth, lewdness, and intemperance. The new one is opposed to all these; is humble, modest, diligent, chaste, and temperate. In this view it is styled, *temperance, moderation* or *self-government*.

As in all these things the spirit communicated in our regeneration not only differs so greatly from that which we possess by nature, but is so directly opposed to it; it must be admitted, that *in all its operations it carries with it some evidence of its existence, in the same manner as our sinful disposition carries with it evidence of its existence.* He who denies that holiness in a renewed mind, can be evidenced by its nature and operations, must also deny, either that any moral character whatever can be perceived to exist, or that a holy disposition is capable of the same proof as a sinful one. That this is philosophy, too unsound to be adopted by a sober man, is so evident as to need no illustration. Indeed it may be doubted whether any man will openly aver this doctrine; although multitudes assert that, which involves it. Certainly a sinner who examines his own heart and life, must discern that he is sinful; with equal certainty an angel must discern that he himself is holy.

From what has been said of the nature of the renewed disposition it is clear, that the man who repents of his sins,

who believes in Christ; who loves and fears God; who disinterestedly loves his neighbour, and forgives his enemies; and who employs himself daily in resisting and subduing his own passions and appetites; *must have some consciousness that he does these things. In this consciousness, as it continually rises up to the view of the mind, consists the primary or original evidence that we are Christians.* Indeed, all the evidence of this nature which we ever possess, is no other than this consciousness variously modified, and rendered more explicit and satisfactory, by the aid of several things with which from time to time it becomes connected.

Having made these general observations, I shall proceed to state the following particulars, in which, I apprehend this evidence will be especially seen.

1st. *The renewed mind relishes all spiritual objects.*

Every man knows what it is to relish natural objects; such as agreeable food, ease, warmth, rest, friends, beauty, novelty, and grandeur. Every man knows, that *these objects are relished also in themselves; for their own sake; as being in themselves pleasant to the mind, independently of consequences, and of all other extraneous considerations. In the same manner,* according to what is here intended, *are spiritual objects relished by the renewed mind.* A Christian regards the character of God, the character of Christ, the divine law, the gospel, and his own duty, as objects pleasing in their own nature. Thus David, of the religious exercises of whose mind we have a more detailed account than we have of those of any other scriptural writer, says concerning the *statutes of the Lord,* that *they are right; rejoicing the heart: more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter than honey, and the honeycomb.* And again, *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth. I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold.* And again, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon the earth whom I desire beside thee. Oh taste, and see that the Lord is good! Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye upright in heart!* With these expressions of David correspond all the declarations of the other

divine writers, wherever they are made. Thus St. Paul says, *I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.* Thus also the same apostle says, *I delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man.*

This doctrine has been extensively illustrated in the sermon lately delivered on the subject of *joy in the Holy Ghost;* and therefore will need the less illustration here.

It ought however to be remembered, that a delight in these things, because of some benefit which we have, or imagine ourselves to have derived from them, or which we hope to derive from them immediately, or from the relish of them; whether it be the favour of God, comforting evidence of our Christianity, or any other benefit whatever; is not the kind of relish of which I speak. This is directed towards the things themselves; as being in themselves delightful to the taste of the mind. If the character of God is excellent, it cannot but be supposed that this excellence must be relished by a person suitably disposed; and *that* although this person were to be ignorant of any manner in which he himself was to derive personal benefit from it.

Wherever this relish exists it will ordinarily shew itself, not only in the manner in which the mind immediately regards spiritual objects, but in its remoter operations. Thus, if a man really relishes the worship of God, he will be apt to be regularly employed in it at all proper seasons. He will find himself inclined to ejaculatory prayer; to pray in his closet, in the family, and in the church. If he loves the Scriptures, he will be apt to read them regularly, much and often. If he relishes the company of religious persons, he will naturally frequent it, seek it and derive from it, when enjoyed, a sensible pleasure.

To *secret prayer* there seems to be hardly any allurement, sufficient to keep the regular practice of it alive for a great length of time, beside a relish for communion with God. It is plain that secret prayer cannot be continued with a view to be seen of men, or the hope of acquiring reputation. As in its own nature it cannot but be disrelished by every sinner; it seems as if it must of course be soon dropped, where piety does not keep it alive. Thus Job seems to have reasoned, when he said concerning *the hypocrite, Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon*

God? Job xxvii. 10. As if he had said, "He will not delight himself in the Almighty; and therefore will not always, or throughout life, continue to pray to God: but will cease from this practice after the casual feelings and views which gave birth to it have ceased to operate." A continued relish for secret prayer, furnishes therefore a strong and hopeful testimony that we are Christians.

St. John informs us, that the *love of Christians* also is a satisfactory proof that *we* are Christians. *Hereby we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* As this subject was extensively considered in the discourse on brotherly love, it will be unnecessary to dwell upon it here. It will however be proper to observe, that we are not in the present case supposed to love Christians, because they are our personal friends; or because they have been, or are expected to be, useful to us; but, because they are Christians; and on account of the excellence and amiableness of the Christian spirit which they possess and manifest. For this reason God loves them; that is, with the love usually termed complacency; and for this reason only, since he can plainly receive no benefit from them. For the same reason they are loved by their fellow-Christians.

In order to know whether we love them, it will be proper to ask ourselves the questions mentioned in the discourse alluded to. "Do we love their goodness of character? Do we seek their company? Do we relish their conversation? Do we take pleasure in their Christian conduct? Do we pray for their prosperity, their holiness, and their salvation?"

I will only add under this head, that with respect to all spiritual objects, we are carefully to inquire whether we relish them at all; and whether we relish them for themselves; for the excellence which they possess; or for some apprehended benefit, which may be derived from them to ourselves.

2dly. *Real religion is always accordant with the dictates of reason, enlightened by revelation.*

By this I intend, that it is not, on the one hand, the mere result of passion, affection, or impulse; as in every case of enthusiasm; and that it is not, on the other, the result of

mere philosophy, or the decisions of human reason, unenlightened by revelation; as is the case with the professed natural religion of Deists. The good *conscience* of a good man is, on the one hand, *purged from* these *dead works;* and, on the other, exercises such a control over all the affections, as to direct their various operations steadily towards that which the Scriptures have pronounced to be true and right.

Religion, in the scriptural sense, is *a reasonable,* not a casual, nor an instinctive, *service.* Man acts in it, not as an animal, under the mere impulse of animal affections; not as a subject of mere passion; not as a creature of mere imagination; nor as a mere subject of all these united; but as a rational being, in whom the understanding governs, and in whom the affections only aid, animate, and obey. There are Christians in profession, whose religion seems to be nothing but a compound of mere impulses and affections. There are others, whose religion appears to be little else beside a cold, heartless collection of propositions, or doctrines, quietly lying side by side in the understanding, without any influence on the heart, or on the life. In the religion of the gospel, the *heart* is plainly made the great essential: but it is *the heart under the steady direction, and rational control, of the understanding. Real Christianity is the energy, or active power, of the soul, steadily directed to that which is believed to be right, and thus directed to it, merely because it is right.* That which is aimed at is loved and pursued, because of its rectitude, admitted on satisfactory and solid evidence.

From this source, the renewed man is furnished with important evidence of his sanctification. If he finds in himself a steady disposition to learn, as far as possible, the true import of the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, and, in this manner, the real nature of his own duty; if he loves moral rectitude in such a degree as anxiously to inquire what it is; and if, when he has learned what it is, he is disposed to yield to proof and conviction, and pursue his duty, because it is seen to be his duty; he may justly be satisfied, that he is really renewed.

But if, on the contrary, he is accustomed to obey the casual impulses of feeling and imagination; if he is disposed

to think highly of passages of Scripture, not because they are the word of God, or are excellent in themselves; declaring important truths, or enjoining important duties; but because they have come into the mind suddenly, accidentally, and without any forethought of his own; if he is inclined to prize such texts more than others, or more than he prized the same texts before; if he is disposed to think highly of sudden starts of feeling, of thoughts, and purposes, unexpectedly coming into the mind, and to regard them as produced by an extraordinary divine agency, and therefore to value them highly, as peculiar tokens of the favour of God, and as authoritative and safe guides to his own duty: if he is fond of indulging a lively imagination about the things of religion; of forming to himself awful views concerning the world of misery, and the sufferings of its inhabitants; or bright and beautiful visions of the light and splendour of heaven, and the glory of its inhabitants; or charming images of the person of Christ, as beautiful in form, ravishing in aspect, and surrounded with radiance; or as meek, gentle, looking with compassion, or smiling with complacency, on himself: if he is inclined to rest on these feelings and impulses, as the peculiar foundations of his hope, consolation, and confidence; or as any foundations of hope and confidence at all: I will not say, that such a man is not renewed; but I will say, that he trusts without evidence, and builds upon sand. I will farther say, that he is miserably deluded with regard to this great subject; that he feeds on wind, and not on food; and that by directing his eye to false objects, from which he never can derive any real good, he loses the golden privilege of gaining solid support, and evangelical comfort, from those sources whence alone God has intended they should be derived.

3dly. *The prevalence of a meek and an humble disposition, furnishes the mind with good reason to believe that it is renewed.*

The natural spirit of man is universally proud and irritable. No part of the human character is so predominant, more pleasant to ourselves, more deceitful, or more universal. At the same time, as we might expect, none is so much cherished by the mind. A great part of the perfec-

tion aimed at and delineated by the wise men of heathen antiquity was formed of pride. Stoical pride is proverbial. The love of glory, according to Cicero, was virtue, or real excellence of character.

Devoted as we are to the indulgence of pride, it is, perhaps, of all passions, the most unworthy and mischievous; the most irritable, the most unforgiving, the most unforgiving, the most wrathful, the most contentious, and the most oppressive. The world has been filled by it with private quarrels and public wars; with wretchedness at the fire-side; with turmoil in the neighbourhood; and with bloodshed and desolation in the great scenes of national activity. It has brought forth the tyrant; and nursed the conqueror.

The religion of the gospel has laid the axe at the root of this passion. Christ, the glorious author of this religion, has exhibited, in his own life, a character perfectly contrasted to pride, in every degree, and in every exercise. This character he has beautifully expressed in that memorable and delightful declaration subjoined to the most consoling invitation, and the happiest tidings, ever published to the children of men. *Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek, and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* In conformity with this declaration, his whole life was a life of meekness and humility. In conformity with this declaration also he has every where in the gospel preferred, as was remarked in one of the discourses on his character, the meek and lowly virtues to the magnanimous and splendid ones. He has inculcated them oftener; has dwelt on them more; has enjoined them in stronger terms, and has made them in a higher degree indispensable.

As these virtues, then, are such a prominent and essential part of Christianity; it will be easily seen, that they must be found in every Christian. So long as pride is the predominating spirit of man, he must know [illegible] at all with himself, that he is not sanctified. [illegible] of the influence of the Spirit of sanctification [illegible] in annihilating this haughty, self-dependant [illegible] One of the first perceptible effects of this [illegible]

humility of the gospel. An humble mind is of course meek; little disposed to feel provocations deeply; uninclined to construe them in the worst manner; and still more indisposed to requite them with wrath and revenge. What is thus the result of the Christian spirit, is continually strengthened by the general disposition of the Christian to obey the precepts and to follow the example of his Master; both conspiring to enforce on him the same conduct in the most powerful manner. He knows, that Christ has required the *same mind which was in himself* (and peculiarly in this respect), to be in all his followers. He sees the beauty and glory of the disposition in his great example. He knows, that nothing without it will render him acceptable to God, or qualify him for admission into his kingdom. With these mighty motives in view, it seems impossible, that this disposition, once begun in the soul, should fail to manifest itself, in some good degree, by its genuine and happy effects.

The evidence which it furnishes to the mind of its renovation is twofold. Its former dispositions are weakened; and new ones have begun to prevail in their place. Pride is enfeebled in all its operations; the propensity to wrath is lessened; and humility and meekness (not insensibility to injuries, but a serene quiet of soul under them) have, like beautiful twin sisters, entered the mind, and made it their permanent habitation.

He who finds this his own state, possesses desirable evidence that he is a Christian.

4thly. *Without a prevailing spirit of gentleness towards others, we cannot have sound and scriptural evidence of our Christianity.*

This is a kindred subject to the last. The natural character of man is rough, revengeful, and unforgiving; disposed to overbear, to carry his measures by force and violence, to listen little to the wishes and reasons of others, and to arrogate to himself and his concerns, an importance which all impartial persons see does not belong to them.

To this spirit also, the gospel is directly and equally opposed. It enjoins every where a spirit of gentleness, moderation, and forgiveness, towards all men. Its Author was wonderfully distinguished by softness and sweetness of dis-

position. He never intruded on the rights of others. He used no force, nor even wrought a single miracle, to vindicate his own. He *neither cried, nor lifted up, nor caused his voice to be heard in the streets.* In the garden he healed the ear of Malchus; and on the cross he prayed for his murderers. At the same time he required all his followers to possess and exhibit the same gentle and forgiving disposition, on pain of not being otherwise themselves forgiven. Nay, he has forbidden them to ask forgiveness of God upon any other condition. *The servant of the Lord,* saith St. Paul, *must not strive, but be gentle towards all men.*

The existence and influence of this part of the Christian character are especially seen in cases where we have been injured, and towards those who have injured us. If beside quietly receiving injuries, we exercise a benevolent spirit towards those who have done them; if we can lay aside all thoughts of retaliation; if we can shew them kindness; if we can rejoice in their prosperity; if we can feel and relieve their distresses; if we can heartily pray for their well-being; we have good reason to conclude, that *the same mind which was in Christ, is also in us.*

5thly. *A willingness to perform, accompanied by the actual performance of, the duties required by the gospel, is an indispensable evidence of Christianity.*

There are multitudes of persons in the Christian world, who appear to place religion *greatly,* if not *wholly,* in such feelings of the mind, as are rarely or never followed by any of those overt acts of obedience, which are commonly called Christian duties. Their *love,* contrary to the injunction given by St. John, appears to exist *only in word and in tongue; not in deed,* and therefore, we have reason to fear, not *in truth.* We find persons of this character willing to converse much on religious subjects; to dwell on the nature of religious affections; to canvas abundantly the doctrines of the gospel; to explain minutely the nature of its precepts; to expose such tenets of others as they esteem erroneous; to defend strenuously such as they think true; and often mix with all these things not a little censure of those who differ from them in opinion and character. I will not say, that these persons are destitute of religion;

but I will say, that, so far, they furnish little reason why others should believe them religious.

Real religion is ever active; and always inclined to *do* as well as to *say*. The end for which man was made, and for which he was redeemed, was, that he might do good, and actively glorify his Creator. To this end all the instructions and precepts of the gospel were given, all the blessings of providence, and all the influences of the Spirit of God. All these, therefore, are frustrated, and are without efficacy, where men do not thus act. The business of a Christian is not to say to others, *Be ye warmed, and be ye filled; depart in peace;* but to feed and clothe them. This, I acknowledge, may be done by such as are not Christians; but he who does it not, cannot, so far as I see, be a Christian. Active obedience is the only visible fruit by which our religious character is discovered to others: and the fruit by which, in a manner peculiarly happy, it is known to ourselves.

To render this evidence of our sanctification satisfactory, it should, in the first place, be uniform.

By this I intend, that *our active obedience should proceed in a manner generally regular through life.* I intend, that it should not exist by fits and starts, be cold to-day and warm to-morrow; now zealous, now indifferent; at one time animated by a strong sense of heavenly things, at another absorbed in those of earth; at one time charitable, perhaps even to excess; at another, *withholding more than is meet;* and all this according to the rise and prevalence of different natural feelings. The spirit of Christianity is *one* in its nature, and therefore uniform in its operations. These indeed are diversified, as the objects which they respect vary. Thus the same disposition sorrows for sin, which rejoices in the Holy Ghost; and is at peace with itself, while it contends with its spiritual enemies. Still a single character runs through them all, differing indeed in degree, but not in kind. Under its influence, the life will wear one general aspect. By ourselves, therefore, if we examine, and by others who are attentive to our conduct, it will be seen to be of the same nature, and to produce the same effects, throughout the progress of life. I do not mean, that we shall not backslide, or that we shall not have lukewarm,

uncomfortable, unprofitable, and unexemplary seasons. These unhappily recur but too often. A field of wheat may grow with different vigour, may at times be checked by cold and stinted by drought; and may at other times, and under the influence of refreshing showers and kindly seasons, flourish with strength, verdure, and beauty. Still it will always be a field of wheat, and not of tares and darnel.

Secondly. *This obedience must, for the same end, be universal.*

By this I intend, that *it must extend alike to all those duties which immediately respect God, our fellow-creatures, and ourselves.* Real virtue, or the religion of the gospel, never exists by halves. There is no such thing, as being pious and not benevolent, or being benevolent and not pious, or being both and not self-governed. *Religion in this sense is a spirit of obedience to God; and regards all his commands alike.*

If then we would derive from our obedience that satisfactory evidence of our Christianity which it is capable of furnishing; we should examine ourselves concerning our whole conduct, and inquire how far it wears this universal character. We should inquire diligently, whether we regularly and steadily employ ourselves, at all proper seasons, in the worship of God, in reading the Scriptures, in communion with Christians, in communion with our own hearts, in watching, striving, and praying, against our lusts within and enemies without; in overcoming *the world, the flesh, and the devil;* in resisting especially the *sins which most easily beset us;* in raising our thoughts and affections to heavenly objects; and in endeavouring effectually to make in the present life preparation for eternity. Universally we should inquire whether we live alway in the fear, love, and service, of God, with a spirit of dependance, confidence, submission, contentment, and gratitude.

Among the duties to which we are summoned by the gospel, those which we owe immediately to our fellow-creatures and to ourselves, are there exhibited as being of very high and indispensable importance. They are every where insisted on in the plainest, strongest, and most affecting manner; are commended, urged, enjoined, and promised, a reward, from the beginning to the end of the Bible. At the same time, the neglect and the violation of them are

condemned in the severest terms, and threatened under the most glowing images with the severest punishment. *Who,* says the Psalmist, *shall abide in thy tabernacle; who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart; that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour; in whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord: He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not: He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh a reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved. If ye for givemen their trespasses,* said our Saviour to his disciples, *your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses.* The servant who owed ten thousand talents to his Lord, had his debt readily forgiven. But when he oppressed his fellow-servant, the Lord delivered him over to the tormentors, till he should pay the debt. *If any man will not work, neither let him eat. If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house; he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. Be not deceived,* says St. Paul; *neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. Blessed,* says David, *is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.*

And, what may serve instead of a volume upon this subject, Christ, seated on the throne of final judgment, will, as he declares, *say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye ministered unto me; and inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me. To them on the left hand, he will* also *say, Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in;*

naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not; and, *inasmuch as ye did it not to the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me.*

From these passages of Scripture it will be seen irresistibly, that the duties of these two classes are, in the eye of God, of incalculable importance, *and are indispensable to the Christian character, and to the attainment of salvation.*

Let it not be supposed for a moment, however, that I intend to prefer these duties to those which immediately respect God. Piety certainly holds the first place in a virtuous character: but no man loves God, who does not love his fellow-men, and control his own passions and appetites. *As the body without the spirit is dead; so faith without* good *works is dead also. He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*

There is one point of view, in which these duties more effectually evince the Christian character, and prove the reality of our religion, than most of those which are classed under the name of piety. It is this: *they ordinarily demand a greater degree of self-denial.* A man may ordinarily practise the visible duties of piety, without any serious sacrifice of his worldly inclinations. He may read the Scriptures, and teach them to his children. He may attend the worship of God in his family, and in the sanctuary. He may be present in private religious assemblies. He may converse much, and often, on religious subjects. He may be very zealous about all these duties. He may commune at the table of Christ. He may preach the gospel. Yet, instead of crossing his inclinations, or denying himself, he may feel, that he is purchasing a Christian character at a cheap rate; that he is securing to himself the best friends; that he is opening an easy way to distinction, to influence, and in the end to wealth; and that he is, upon the whole, making in this manner a very gainful bargain. Nay, he may in this manner, more easily than in any other, *quiet his own* conscience; persuade himself that he *is a Christian*; feel satisfied that he has a title to eternal life; and thus, while he thinks he is performing his duty, be only seeking for the pleasure found in these things; pleasure which, though derived from sacred objects, is merely natural; and differs in

nothing important from that which is furnished by pleasant food, fine weather, or a beautiful landscape.

But when a man is called to resist his passions and appetites; when he is required to be humble, meek, patient, forgiving, just, sincere, merciful, sober, chaste, and temperate; when he is required to communicate his property liberally to the poor, the stranger, and the public; and practically to *remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive:* he is required, of course, to sacrifice *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.* He is required to give up his pride, vanity, ambition, anger, avarice, and sensuality. These darling inclinations, which constitute what is called in the Scriptures *the love of the world,* together with all the objects on which they are pampered, he is obliged to yield up to the love of God.

Nothing more strongly evinces the sincerity of any professions, than the fact that they are followed by serious self-denial. Accordingly, the Scriptures have placed peculiar stress upon self-denial, as evidential of the genuineness of a Christian profession. *If any man will be my disciple,* said our Saviour, *let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. If any man will save his life, he shall lose it; and if any man will lose his life for my sake, he shall find it. Go and sell all that thou hast,* said he to the young ruler, *and give to the poor, and come and follow me; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. Love not the world,* says St. John, *neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

When therefore we find the love of the world actually prevailing, and clearly manifested in the life and conversation of persons who make a profession of religion; the evidence of their piety, of whatever nature it may be, must be exceedingly diminished in the eye of sober charity. Whatever zeal they may discover in attending upon public or private worship; however well they may converse upon religious subjects; whatever feelings they may discover in such conversation; and whatever bright discoveries they may seem to enjoy concerning the mercy or glory of God, or the love and excellence of Christ; if still they are greedy of gain, absorbed in the world; peevish, discontented,

wrathful, slothful, sensual, unfeeling, vain of their attainments, uncharitable, particularly if they are eagerly engaged in the pursuit of place, power, popularity, and fame; and, more particularly still, if they refuse to give to the poor, or give leanly and grudgingly, or deny aid to others in other distresses; there will be little reason left to believe them children of God. How can these persons expect Christ to say at the final judgment, *I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; sick, and ye visited me?* How can he say, *Ye did it unto the least of these, my brethren?* Were he on earth, and should tell them, as he told the young ruler, *Go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor;* would they not *go away sorrowful?* Would they not feel, that even to *have treasure in heaven,* upon these conditions, would be a hard bargain?

There have been, there are still, multitudes of mankind; and it is to be feared that in this land, and at the present time, the number is not small; of those who intend to go to heaven with a cheap religion: a religion, in which *the love of the world* is made to harmonize with *the love of the Father.* This religion consists of feelings, views, discoveries, conversation about these and other religious subjects, and zeal in attending upon external religious duties. But *whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him; how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

It is easy for any man, who thinks that he is loved by God, to love him in turn. But this is not that love of God which he requires. The feelings and views which do not prompt us to virtuous conduct are of no value. If we would prove ourselves to be Christians, we should then diligently ask ourselves, whether we aim at being strictly just, sincere, and faithful; whether we actually shew kindness to men, whether friends or enemies, strangers or neighbours; whether we *do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again;* whether we befriend and promote public, useful, and charitable designs; employing both our substance and efforts, as either may be needed; whether we love the souls of others, oppose their sins, and promote in them reformation and piety; and whether we are watchfully sober,

chaste, temperate, diligent in our callings, and active in our opposition to every worldly lust.

Finally, concerning all these things we should carefully ask, whether we take delight in such a life as this; and *that*, notwithstanding all the opposition, ridicule, and contempt, of the world.

Among the different acts or kinds of obedience, also, *particular attention is due to those which involve peculiar self-denial.* When the avaricious man becomes generous and charitable; the ambitious man contented with his circumstances; the proud man humbled; the wrathful man meek; the revengeful man forgiving; and the sensualist sober, chaste, and temperate; in a word, when we drop our reigning sins, and assume the contrary virtues, of set and cordial purpose: we are furnished with strong reason to believe that we are Christians.

6thly. *The increase of all these things in the mind and life, is perhaps the clearest of all the evidences of personal religion.*

St. Paul informs us, that *he did not count himself to have apprehended:* that is, he did not consider himself as having attained that degree of excellence, which belonged to his Christian profession. *But,* saith he, *this one thing I do:* or perhaps, as the omission in the text is supplied by Doddridge, *this one thing I can say: Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth to those which are before* (in the Greek, *reaching out eagerly*), *I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* What was the conduct of Paul is the *duty* of all Christians; and is accordingly enjoined by him in the following verse. In greater or less degrees it is their *conduct* also. They are directed *so to run, that they may obtain;* and to *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; to increase and abound in love one towards another, and towards all men.*

As it is the duty of Christians to fulfil these precepts; so it is the nature of Christianity to accord with them, by increasing, from time to time, their strength and vigour. The more the spirit of the gospel is exercised, the more we love to exercise it. The more the pleasure found in it is enjoyed, the more it is coveted. The more habitual its principles and

practices become, the greater is the strength which they acquire. Indeed, nothing is vigorous and powerful in man beside that which is habitual.

Hence it is plain, that in investigating our religious character, we should examine it with a particular reference to its growth. To grow is its proper nature. If it is not seen to grow, then we either do not see it as it is; or it does not exist in us in its genuine character; but is feeble, fading, sickly, clogged with incumbrances, and in a great measure hidden from view. Man is never for any length of time stationary. Either he is advancing or receding in every thing which pertains to him; and in religion as truly as in his natural endowments or acquisitions. Declension in religion, I need not say, furnishes a melancholy evidence that we are not religious. It is no less obvious, that a regular progress, in its various graces and attainments, must, on the contrary, become a clear and delightful testimony of our Christian character. There is not only more of religion to be seen in ourselves; but it is discerned with clearer conviction and certainty to be genuine; because it appears, as real religion naturally appears, in its own proper character of growth and improvement. He who loves, fears, and serves, God more and more; who is more and more just, sincere, and merciful, to his fellow-men; and who is more and more self-governed in all his appetites and passions, weaned from the world, and spiritually and heavenly minded; cannot want the best reasons, furnished in our present state, to believe, that he is a child of God.

SERMON XC.

EVIDENCES OF REGENERATION.

DIFFICULTIES ATTENDING THE APPLICATION OF THESE EVIDENCES TO OURSELVES.

Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith: prove your ownselves; know ye not your ownselves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?—2 COR. XIII. 5.

IN the last discourse but one, I proposed, from these words, to examine,

I. *Some of the imaginary evidences of regeneration;*

II. *Some of the real evidences;* and,

III. *Some of the difficulties which attend the application of the real evidences to ourselves.*

There has been much debate in the Christian world concerning *the faith of assurance;* or, as it is in better language styled by St. Paul, *the full assurance of hope.* The question debated has, however, not been, *whether men felt assured that they were Christians,* but *whether this assurance has been evangelical,* or *built on satisfactory and scriptural evidence.* That such a faith has existed I have no doubt; nor do I see how it can be rationally doubted. That the apostles were evangelically assured of their own piety and consequent salvation, must be admitted by all who believe the Scriptures. *I have fought a good fight,* says St. Paul, *I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. For me to live is Christ; to die is gain. We know,* says St. John, *that we have passed from death unto life.* From the accounts given us concerning the first martyrs, I think we cannot hesitate to admit, that they also were the subjects of the same faith. Nor is the evidence concerning a number of those who have lived and suffered in modern times, less convincing to *me.* These men have, in various instances, lived in a manner eminently evangelical; having devoted themselves, through a long period, to the service of God, with so much humility, self-denial, uniformity, steadfastness, and evangelical zeal;

have laboured for the good of their fellow-creatures with so much disinterestedness, charity, and constancy; have lived so much above the world, and with a conversation so heavenly; that, when they are declaring themselves possessed of this faith, and have died with peace and exultation which must be supposed to result from it, we cannot, unless by wilful rejection of evidence, hesitate to admit, that they were possessed of this enviable attainment. Indeed, I can hardly doubt, that any man who reads their history with candour, will readily admit the doctrine, so far as the men to whom I refer are concerned. But, if these things be admitted, it will probably be readily conceded, that there are, in every country and in every age where Christianity prevails, some persons who enjoy the faith or hope of assurance.

At the same time I am fully persuaded, that the number of these persons is not very great. If the Christians and ministers with whom I have had opportunity to converse, many of whom have been eminently exemplary in their lives, may be allowed to stand as representatives of Christians in general; it must certainly be true, that the faith of assurance is not common.

Indeed I am persuaded, that this blessing is much more frequently experienced in times and places of affliction and persecution, than in seasons of peace and prosperity. Severe trials and sufferings furnish of themselves clearer proofs of the piety of those who are tried, than can ordinarily be furnished by circumstances of ease and quiet. The faith, which will patiently submit, which will encounter, which will endure, which will overcome, in periods of great affliction, has, in this very process, both acquired and exhibited peculiar strength; and furnished evidence of its genuineness which can hardly be derived from any other source.

At the same time, it is, I think, irresistibly inferred from the declarations contained in the word of God, and from the history of his providence recorded both within and without the Scriptures, that God in his infinite mercy furnishes his children with peculiar support and consolation in times of peculiar trial; and that, as their *day is, so* he causes their *strength to be.* Among the means of consolation enjoyed

by Christians, none seems better adapted to furnish them with the necessary support under severe distresses, than an assurance that they are children of God. Accordingly, this very consolation appears to have been given to the suffering saints of the Old and New Testament, as a peculiar support to them in their peculiar trials. From analogy it might be concluded, and from the history of facts it may with the strongest probability, if not with absolute certainty, be determined, that the same blessing has been given, in times of eminent affliction, to saints in every succeeding age of the church.

Still there is no reason to think, that the faith of assurance is generally attained among eminent Christians. This fact has sometimes been called in question; sometimes denied; and oftener wondered at. "Why," it is inquired, "are not Christians oftener, nay, why are they not generally, assured of their gracious state? There certainly is a difference between sin and holiness, sufficiently broad to be seen and marked. The Scriptures have actually marked this difference with such clearness and exactness, as to give us ample information concerning both the nature and the limits of these great moral attributes. They have separated those who possess them into two classes, not only entirely distinct, but directly opposite to each other: so opposite, that the one class is styled, in them, the friends, and the other the enemies, of God. Farther, they present to us various means of judging, by which we are directed, as well as encouraged and enabled, to try and estimate our own religious character. The subject is also so spoken of in the Scriptures, as naturally to lead us into the conclusion, that these different characters may be distinctly known; and that it is our duty so to act, as, upon the whole, to form satisfactory views concerning our moral condition. Finally, the writers of the New Testament, and indeed of the Old also, speak of themselves, as knowing their own piety; and of others, as able to know theirs."

To these observations I answer, in the first place, that holiness and sin are in themselves thus clearly distinguishable. Angels cannot but know that they are holy; and fiends that they are sinful.

Secondly; This difference is sufficiently marked in the

Scriptures. If we saw holiness in ourselves, exactly as it is exhibited in the Scriptures; that is, unmixed; we should certainly know ourselves to be holy.

Thirdly; Holy and sinful men, are just as different from each other as they are represented in the Scriptures; but this does not enable us to determine which they are.

Fourthly; The means furnished us in the Scriptures of judging concerning our religious character, are undoubtedly the best which the nature of our circumstances will admit; and such, as if correctly applied to ourselves, and known to be thus applied, would undoubtedly decide this great point in a satisfactory manner. Still this does not infer that it usually will, or can, be thus decided.

Fifthly; We are undoubtedly required in the Scriptures to examine ourselves; and the performance of this duty, while it is indispensable on our part, unquestionably may be, and is, of great importance to us: although we may not, as a consequence of it, become possessed of the faith of assurance.

Sixthly; The writers in the Old and New Testament did, in many instances, certainly know, that they were holy; but they were inspired. It will not therefore follow, that others, who are uninspired, will of course possess the same knowledge of their own state.

Seventhly; the scriptural writers very extensively use the words *know*, and *knowledge*, not in the sense of *absolute science*, but to denote *belief*, *persuasion*, *a strong hope*, &c. in the same manner as these terms are used in common speech. We cannot, therefore, certainly conclude, from the use of these terms, with respect to this subject, that the divine writers expected those to whom they wrote, generally to possess the faith of assurance.

Finally, it *is* our duty to possess this faith. It is also our duty to be perfect. Yet St. John says of himself, and all other Christians, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* As therefore, notwithstanding this duty, no man is perfect; so, notwithstanding the duty of obtaining the faith of assurance, few persons may actually possess it.

The real difficulty is chiefly passed by in all the observations made above, and lies in applying the scriptural evi-

dences of holiness to our own particular cases. This subject I shall now attempt to examine in several particulars.

The difficulties which attend the application of these evidences to ourselves, arise from various sources. Among them, the following will be found to possess a very serious influence.

1st. *The vast importance of the case.*

A case of great moment is, at all times, apt strongly to agitate our minds. Men, deeply interested by any concern, are, therefore, considered as less capable of discerning clearly, and judging justly, than the same men when dispassionate. As this is the subject even of proverbial declaration, it cannot need proof. The case in hand is of infinite moment to each individual. Whenever he brings it to view, he is prone to feel a degree, and often not a small one, of anxiety. It is therefore seen, together with the evidences which attend it, by the mind through the medium of disturbed feelings. Earnest wishes to find satisfaction, on the one hand, and strong apprehensions lest it should not be found on the other, naturally disorder that calm temperament, which is so necessary to clear investigation, and satisfactory conclusions. In this state, the mind is prone to be unsatisfied with its own investigation; fears that it has not acted impartially; suspects that it has not viewed the evidence possessed by it in a just light; and when its judgments are favourable to itself, is prone to tremble, lest they have been too favourable, and the result of biassed inclinations, rather than of clear discernment. A presumptuous decision in its favour, it perfectly well knows to be full of danger; and is ready to think almost every favourable judgment presumptuous. In this situation all such judgments are apt to be regarded with a general suspicion; and the mind chooses rather to continue unsatisfied, and to undergo the distresses of anxiety and alarm, than to hazard the danger of ill-founded conclusions in its own favour. Most Christians are, I believe, so strongly convinced, that a state of anxiety will contribute to make them alive and awake to the danger of backsliding, to quicken them in their duty, and to secure them from carelessness and sloth; and that, therefore, it will have a happy influence towards rendering them safe, as willingly to judge too unfavourably,

rather than too favourably, of their own religious character. An unfavourable judgment, they know, does not render the character itself any worse; but only deprives them of the consolation which, with more favourable views of it, they might enjoy; while the contrary opinion might naturally slacken them in their duty, and perhaps prevent them finally from obtaining salvation.

2dly. *Another source of difficulties is found in the peculiar natural character of those who are employed in this investigation.*

Some of these persons are naturally inclined to hope; others to fear; some to cheerfulness, others to melancholy. Some are rash; others are cautious. Some are ignorant; others are well informed. But the evidences which establish, or should establish, a favourable judgment of our Christian character, are in substance always the same. As applied to persons of these different characters, they must however be seen in very different lights; because although religion is the same thing, yet so much of the peculiar natural character of the man remains after he has become religious, as to render him a very different man from every other religious man. Paul and John were both eminently religious. Their religion was the same thing; but the men were widely different from each other. If Christians, so eminent and excellent, could differ in this manner; how much more different from each other must be ordinary Christians! How much more must the natural character remain in *them!* particularly such as in a greater or less degree are sinful! The whole object therefore, presented to the judgment of the individual, must differ, and often greatly, in different cases.

For example, one person becomes the subject of piety, after a wise careful religious education; early and uninterrupted habits of conscientiousness, in the possession of a naturally sweet and amiable temper; in an original and regular course of filial duty, fraternal kindness, and exemplary conduct, to those around him; and in the midst of a life generally commendable and lovely. Another, scarcely educated at all, possessed of a rough, gross, and violent disposition, and shamefully vicious from early life, is sanctified in the midst of scandalous indulgences, and rank habits of sin.

It is perfectly obvious, that these two persons will differ mightily from each other in the visible degree of that change of conduct which flows from their religion. The former will perhaps be scarcely changed at all, even to an observing eye; for he has heretofore done, and in a certain sense loved to do, in many particulars, the very things which religion requires, and to which it prompts: and thus the tenor of his life will seem to those around him much the same after as before his conversion. The latter, sanctified in the same degree, will, it is plain, change almost the whole course of *his* conduct; and assume a life entirely new, and directly opposite to that which he led before.

Nor will the difference be small in the internal state of these individuals. The sanctified affections and purposes of the former will, in many instances, so blend themselves with those which he has derived from nature and habit, as to be often distinguished with difficulty, and not unfrequently to be entirely undistinguishable. Those of the latter, on the contrary, will be wholly opposite, in most instances, to all that he has heretofore thought, felt, and designed.

As the internal and external conduct of these individuals is the sole ground on which each must judge of himself, as well as be judged of by others; it is perfectly obvious, that the objects concerning which they are respectively to judge, are widely different from each other. But this is not all. *The optics* with which these persons judge concerning their religious state, will plainly be widely different. Our dispositions naturally influence our judgment; and usually enter much more largely into the opinions which we form than we are aware. Thus a person strongly inclined to hope, will almost of course judge favourably; when a person equally inclined to fear, would in the very same case judge unfavourably, concerning himself. Cheerful persons naturally entertain comfortable views concerning themselves; those who are melancholy, such, and often such only, as are uncomfortable, discouraging, and distressing. The rash form bold and presumptuous opinions, without hesitation. The cautious admit opinions favourable to themselves slowly; even when they are admitted upon acknowledged evidence. The ignorant

must be very imperfectly fitted to consider the various means of evidence, all of which ought to be consulted, in forming our opinions concerning this important subject; while the enlightened Christian must be much more competent to draw up a well-founded determination.

3dly. *The similar nature of those, which we call natural views and affections, to those which are evangelical, furnishes another source of these difficulties.*

Love and hatred, hope and fear, joy and sorrow, confidence and shame, together with various other affections and views of the mind, really exist, and operate, in the Christian as *natural views and affections;* and not merely *evangelical.* The objects which excite these affections in both senses are often the same. The emotions themselves are also so much alike as perceived by the mind, that mankind universally, and the scriptural writers as well as others, call them by the same names. When both are described by those, who are the subjects of them, the description, to a great extent, is commonly the same. It will therefore be easily believed, that they are so similar in their nature, as when they arise from the same objects, to render it difficult, for the Christian in whom they exist, and at times impossible, to distinguish them from each other. It will be also easily seen, that when he who is not a Christian has these affections and views excited in his mind by the objects which excite the corresponding evangelical affections in the mind of a Christian, he may, in many instances, find it very difficult to discern that they are not evangelical.

To illustrate this subject clearly to the view of my audience, I will consider it more particularly.

A Christian loves God, his Son, his Spirit, his law, his gospel, his sabbath, his worship, and his children. Why does he love them? For two reasons. One is; *their nature is agreeable to the relish of his mind.* The other is; *they are useful, and therefore pleasing, to himself.* For both these reasons he is bound to love them. But, when he regards all these objects with this affection, it will be often difficult, and sometimes impossible, for him to determine whether his emotions are merely natural, wholly evangelical, or mixed. He knows, that he exercises a love to God; but may be unable to determine whether he loves the

character of God, considered by itself; whether he loves the divine perfections for what they are; or whether he loves God, because he regards him as a friend to himself; and delights in his perfections, because he considers them as engaging and operating to promote his present and eternal good. It would be difficult for most persons to determine, precisely, what views they would form of this glorious Being, if it were revealed to them, that he was their enemy.

As it is often difficult for *the Christian* to distinguish his natural affections, which so long as he is a man he will always continue to exercise, from the corresponding evangelical ones, which he exercises as a Christian: so it must, evidently, be more difficult for *an unrenewed man*, who has never had any other beside natural affections, to discern, that these are not evangelical. When he loves God, and other divine objects, in what manner shall he determine, that he loves him, only because he believes him reconciled to himself? When he delights in the divine perfections; it will not be easy for him to see, that it is only because he supposes them to be engaged to promote his welfare. When he loves the Scriptures; it will be difficult for him to perceive, that it is only because of their sublimity and beauty; the good sense which they contain; the happy influence which they have on mankind; and the comforting promises which he considers them as speaking to himself. When he loves Christians; it will often be beyond his power to determine, that it is not because of their natural amiableness of character; the agreeableness of their manners; their friendship, or kind offices, to himself; and their general usefulness to others, with whom he is connected.

A person is quiet under provocations. This may arise from meekness. It may also arise from a sense of the wisdom, the dignity, and the usefulness, of this spirit. He is kind to enemies. This may arise from the desire of obtaining the peculiar evidence, that he is a good man, furnished by this exercise of Christian benevolence; from a sense of the nobleness of forgiveness; or from the danger of not finding himself forgiven.

I might extend this course of thought through all the objects of self-examination; and shew, that similar difficulties attend them all. Every Christian must, I think, have ex-

perienced them in his own case; and every person, accustomed to converse much with others on the grounds of their hope concerning themselves, must have perceived them continually occurring in the progress of every such conversation.

4thly. *Another source of this difficulty is found in the transient nature of all our emotions.*

By this I intend, that every exercise of our affections has only a momentary existence in the mind. It rises; is indulged; and is gone. *All our knowledge of its nature,* in the mean time, *exists in the consciousness of it, while it is passing; in our remembrance of that consciousness, known to be imperfect; and in our acquaintance with its effects, often of a character more or less doubtful.* Few words can be necessary to shew, that our knowledge of these exercises, gained in this manner, must be attended by many imperfections. Our opportunity for viewing it, while it is passing, is so short, and often so carelessly employed; our remembrance of it, when it is past, is so far removed from certain accuracy; and its effects may be so easily, and for aught that appears so justly, attributed to various causes; that the whole view, taken of them by the mind, will frequently be obscure, and its decision unsatisfactory.

Hence appears *the wisdom of fastening upon a course of such exercises;* as furnishing far better means of determining our religious character, rather than resting it upon a few. A character may be successfully discerned in *many exercises of a similar kind,* which, usually, we shall attempt in vain to discover, to our satisfaction, *in a small number. A thousand blades of grass* will, in the spring, give a green and living aspect to that field, which, *with a hundred,* would still retain the russet appearance of absolute death.

5thly. *Another fruitful source of the same difficulties is furnished by the imperfect state of religion in the mind.*

This, indeed, may, in an extensive sense, be considered as the general source of them all. I have heretofore observed, that angels cannot but know that they are holy; and fiends, that they are sinful. Were we perfectly holy, then we should certainly know this to be our character.

But there are particular difficulties attending this subject which deserve to be marked.

The mind of every Christian experiences *many alterations of holiness and sin.* Temptations often and unexpectedly intrude. The objects which engross the *whole* heart of the sinner, unhappily engage at times, *in greater or less degrees,* that of the Christian. Nor is their influence always transient. David, Solomon, and other saints mentioned in the Scriptures, sinned for a length of time. Not a small number of sins are committed in thought, word, and action, in the brighter and better seasons; nay, in the brightest and best. "I sin," says bishop Beveridge; "I repent of my sins, and sin in my repentance. I pray for forgiveness, and sin in my prayers. I resolve against my future sin, and sin in forming my resolutions. So that I may say, my whole life is almost a continued course of sin." This is the language of one of the best men that ever lived. A still better man has said, *The good that I would, that I do not: but the evil that I would not, that I do. I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. After the inward man, I delight in the law of God. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

Now, the whole life, not of such men as these, but of men who, though generally of a similar character, are greatly inferior to these in religious excellence, is almost always the real object of a Christian's examination. This also is to be continually examined; the worst and the best parts alike. But it is plain, that the comfortable evidence of our piety, furnished by the prevalence of holiness in the best seasons, will be always impaired by contrary evidence, in periods of declension; will sometimes be rendered obscure, and at others overbalanced. It is farther evident, that, as our whole judgment will, and ought to be usually made up, partly of the evidence furnished by our present state, and partly of our past judgments, and the evidence on which they were founded; evidence contradicting, impairing, and obscuring, each other: a degree of confusion and uncertainty in the views of the mind concerning its religious character, will almost necessarily result, in many instances, from this complicated and perplexed state of things.

6thly. *No small difficulties are often thrown in our way by the backslidings of others.*

Many persons, who are really Christians, decline, at times, from holiness of life so greatly, and so long, as to excite not only the sneers and contempt, but the just censures also of those who *are not* Christians; and the extreme regret, and the Christian discipline, of those who *are*. Other men, in cases of this nature, frequently question or deny the very existence of religion. Christians do not, indeed, go this unwarrantable length; but they cannot avoid recollecting that, frequently, the persons who have thus declined were, in their view, better than themselves; and feeling the hopes, which they have entertained of their own piety, greatly lessened. They are compelled to doubt of the religion of these men; and almost irresistibly question the reality of their own.

There are other persons, who strongly believe themselves to be religious; and who at the same time live in such a manner, as to persuade others, that they are eminent Christians; who afterward prove by their conduct that they are not Christians. Judas, Hymenæus, Philetus, and others, were of this character; and multitudes more in every succeeding age. When these persons fall, all the evidence, which convinced either themselves or others, of their piety, is plainly proved to be unsolid; and we are naturally led to ask whether the evidence, on which *we* have relied, as the foundation of our own hope, be not the very same; or, if it is known to be different, whether we have reason to think it at all better. In this way we naturally come to suspect the grounds on which the belief of our piety has rested, and to doubt whether we are not equally deceived with *them*.

7thly. *I am of opinion, that God, for wise and good reasons, administers his spiritual providence in such a manner, as to leave his children destitute of the faith of assurance for their own good.*

This opinion, I am well aware, will most probably be doubted, although I entertain not a doubt of it myself. It is proper, therefore, that I should mention some reasons which induce me to adopt it.

First. *It is perfectly plain, that the evidence enjoyed by*

Christians concerning their piety, is in no regular manner or degree proportioned to their real excellence of character. The proof of this position is complete both from our own observation, and from the history of experimental and practical religion, given us in the lives of great multitudes of eminently good men. Such men, after having enjoyed for a long time the most consoling evidence of their good estate, have through periods also long been distressed with doubts, and darkness, and sometimes with deep despondence; and have nevertheless afterward obtained the same consolations throughout their remaining lives. To such seasons the Psalmist plainly alludes in many declarations, descriptions, and prayers. These are the seasons in which *he speaks of God as hiding his face from him;* and of himself, as disquieted, troubled, sorrowful, mourning, as almost gone, as having his feet in the miry pit, and as overwhelmed by the billows of affliction. Such seasons are also familiarly spoken of by Christians, as times of darkness and sorrow, in which the light of God's countenance is hidden from them.

Secondly. *There is not, I believe, a single promise in the gospel to Christians, as such, of the faith of assurance; nor any direct intimation that they shall possess evidence of their piety, proportioned to the degree in which it exists.* All the promises of this nature seem to be indefinite; and to indicate, that Christians shall enjoy *some evidence of this nature,* rather than to point out *the degree in which it shall be enjoyed. The Spirit testifies with their spirits,* in a degree and manner accordant with his pleasure, *that they are children of God.* It is indeed said, that *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.* But the word *know,* in this case, plainly means no other, than that he shall have *a strong and satisfying persuasion:* for it cannot be said that *knowledge,* in the proper sense, is ever attainable with regard to this subject. And this strong persuasion, that the Bible is the word of God, may exist without any satisfactory evidence that we are his children.

Thirdly. *There seems to be a plain and important reason, why most Christians should be left in some degree of uncertainty concerning this subject.* In all the earlier stages of their piety, and in all other cases in which it is not emi-

nently vigorous, they would be prone if they possessed high consolatory evidence, especially if they possessed full assurance of renovation, imperfect as they then always are, to be at ease; to settle quietly down in that imperfect state; and in this manner to come far short of those religious attainments, which now they actually make; and perhaps finally to fall away. As the case now is, their fears serve to quicken them no less than their hopes: and by the influence of both they continue to advance in holiness to the end of life.

Fourthly. *The fact is unquestionably, as I have stated it; and it cannot be rationally denied to be a part of the spiritual providence of God.*

REMARKS.

1st. *From these observations we learn the necessity of performing daily and carefully the duty of self-examination.* If such difficulties attend this duty, we are bound to exercise proportionally greater care and exactness in performing it.

2dly. *We are taught to rest our hopes on the general tenor of our dispositions and conduct, and not on particular views, affections, or actions.* These may be counterfeited; but to counterfeit the whole tenor of a life, seems impossible.

3dly. *We perceive the necessity of inquiring particularly, whether we increase in holiness.* Evangelical holiness increases by its own nature, though irregularly. False religious affections by their nature decline at no very late periods.

4thly. *We learn the necessity of searching the Scriptures continually for that evidence which alone is genuine, and on which alone we can safely rest.* In the Scriptures only, is this evidence to be found.

5thly. *How conspicuous are the wisdom and goodness of God, in causing the backslidings and other defects of good men, to be recorded, for the instruction and consolation of Christians in all succeeding ages.* These evils, and the dis-

tresses and doubts which they occasion, attended *them*. Still they were truly pious. They may attend *us* therefore; while we may nevertheless be also subjects of piety.

6thly. *The same wisdom and goodness are still more conspicuous in the manner in which the Psalms are written.* The Psalms are chiefly an account of the experimental religion of inspired men. In this account we find that many of them, particularly David, the principal writer, experienced all the doubts, difficulties, and sorrows, which are now suffered by good men. It is highly probable, that vast multitudes of Christians have by these two means been preserved from final despondence.

7thly. *This subject, in its nature, furnishes strong, though indirect, consolation to Christians.* When they find doubts and consequent distress concerning their religious character, multiplied; they here see, that they *may be* thus multiplied, in perfect consistency with the fact, that they themselves are Christians; and are thus prevented from sinking into despair.

8thly. *We learn the absolute necessity of betaking ourselves to God in daily prayer, for his unerring guidance in this difficult path of duty.* If so many embarrassments attend this important employment; the assistance of the divine Spirit is plainly indispensable to our safety and success. If this assistance be faithfully sought; we know that it will be certainly granted.

9thly. *We here discern the goodness manifested in that indispensable and glorious promise; I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.* For creatures struggling with so many difficulties, to be *left at all*, would be inconceivably dangerous; *to be forsaken would be fatal.* But the divine presence, in the midst of all these, and even much greater dangers, furnishes complete and final safety to every child of God.

SERMON XCI.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE LAW PERFECT.

The law of the Lord is perfect.—PSAL. XIX. 7.

IN the whole preceding series of discourses, I have examined with attention the principal DOCTRINES contained in the Scriptures. Particularly, I have exhibited the existence and perfections of God, and his works of creation and providence; the character and circumstances of man, both before and after his apostacy; and the impossibility of his justification by his personal obedience. I have considered at length, the character and mediation of Christ, and the nature of evangelical justification through his righteousness; the character and agency of the Holy Ghost; the necessity and nature of regeneration; its antecedents, attendants, consequents, and evidences. All these united, constitute the body of those peculiarly important *truths*, to which the Scriptures have required us to render our religious *faith*.

The second great division of subjects, in such a system, is formed of the scriptural PRECEPTS, requiring of us those internal and external acts, commonly termed *the duty* or *duties* of mankind. *We are not however to suppose, that faith in the doctrines of the Scriptures is not itself a prime duty of man.* The contrary has I trust been amply proved. *Nor are we to suppose, that any one of these doctrines has not naturally an important practical influence on mankind.* The contrary to this, also, has, it is presumed, been extensively shewn. Finally, *we are not to suppose, that faith in Christ, and repentance towards God, are duties of fallen beings less real, less necessary, less essential, or less acceptable, than any other duties whatever.* The conformity of the understanding and the heart to every doctrine of the Scriptures is, by the authority of God, made equally a duty with obedience to every precept. All that can with propriety be

said of this nature is, that those which are customarily called the doctrines of the Scriptures, are *usually* presented to us rather in the form of truths which we are to believe, than of commands which we are to obey; and that the precepts are *commonly* given to us in their proper form, requiring our obedience *directly*.

At the same time it is to be observed, that *a conformity of our hearts and lives to the doctrines of the gospel, is often expressly enjoined by the Scriptures.* To repent of our sins, and to believe in Christ, are the immediate objects of the great precepts of the gospel. It is farther to be observed, that *every precept becomes, by a slight alteration in the phraseology, a doctrine.* For example, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,* is easily altered into a mere truth, only by changing the phraseology into, "It is right, or It is thy duty to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." A cordial faith in this declaration is here, as with respect to every other precept, the spirit whence is derived all genuine obedience.

Truth is commonly divided into that which is practical, and that which is speculative. But moral truth cannot, in the strict sense, be justly divided in this manner. Every moral truth is of a practical nature. Its influence, I acknowledge, is in some cases indirect; while in others it is direct. But it can never be truly denied in any case, that its influence is really of this nature.

The observations which I intend to make on the several subjects included in the second great division of the system of theology, I propose to preface *with a general account of the divine law.* The doctrine which I mean to discuss in this account, is that which the text expresses in the very best terms which can be chosen; viz.

THE LAW OF JEHOVAH IS PERFECT.

In proof of this truth I allege the following considerations.

1st. *The law of God is the result of his infinite wisdom and goodness.*

It cannot be supposed, that infinite wisdom and goodness would form a rule for the government of moral beings, which did not possess such attributes as must render it a *perfect directory of their moral conduct.* It may easily be

believed, that God may make moral beings, of many different classes: some of superior, and some of inferior capacities: but it cannot be imagined, that he would not require of all such beings a character and conduct the best of which they were *naturally* capable. Inferior wisdom and goodness might be unable to devise, or uninclined to require, the best conduct and character in moral creatures; or to point out the *means* by which this character could be most easily and perfectly formed; or the *conduct* in which it would most advantageously operate. But none of these things are attributable to infinite wisdom and goodness thus employed. They of course must require the best character and conduct; must point out the best means of forming it, and the best modes in which it can operate. To suppose a law which is the result of these attributes not to be perfect, is to suppose, either that God did not know what would be the best character in his moral creatures, or did not choose to require it of them. Both parts of this alternative are too obviously absurd to need a refutation.

Farther; a law is always the expression of the will of the lawgiver; and is of course an expression of his own character. This is pre-eminently applicable to the law of God. In forming it he was under no necessity, and could have no motive beside what is involved in his own pleasure, to induce him to form it in any given manner. The things which it requires, are the things which he approves, and is seen to approve; the things in which he delights, and is seen to delight; the things therefore which entirely shew his real character. But the things actually required include all which are due from his moral creatures to *him*, to *each other*, and to *themselves*; or, in other words, all their internal and external moral conduct. But it cannot be supposed, that God would exhibit his own *perfect* character *imperfectly* in a case of this magnitude. That in a law expressing thus his own character, and seen to express it; a law from which they must of necessity learn his character more certainly than from any thing else; a law which regulated and required all the moral conduct ever required of them; he should not prescribe a perfect collection of rules; a collection absolutely perfect; is a supposition amounting to nothing less than this: that in exhibiting his character to

the intelligent universe, he would present it in a false light and lead them by a solemn act of his own, necessarily to consider him either as a weak or as an immoral being.

2dly. *The law of God is perfectly fitted to the state and capacity of intelligent creatures.*

The divine law is wholly included in two precepts; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; and thy neighbour as thyself.* These are so *short*, as to be necessarily included in a single very short sentence; so *intelligible*, as to be understood by every moral being who is capable of comprehending the meaning of the words God and neighbour: so *easily remembered*, as to render it impossible for them to escape from our memory, unless by wanton criminal negligence of ours: and so *easily applicable to every case of moral action*, as not to be mistaken, unless through indisposition to obey. At the same time, *obedience to them is rendered perfectly obvious and perfectly easy* to every mind which is not indisposed to obey them. The very disposition itself, if sincere and entire, is either entire obedience, or the unfailing means of that external conduct by which the obedience is in some cases completed. *The disposition to obey is also confined to a single affection of the heart*, easily distinguishable from all other affections: viz. *love*. *Love*, saith St. Paul, *is the fulfilling of the law*. The humblest and most ignorant moral creatures, therefore, are in this manner efficaciously preserved from mistaking their duty.

In the mean time, *these two precepts*, notwithstanding their brevity, *are so comprehensive* as to include every possible moral action. The archangel is not raised above their control; nor can any action of his exceed that bound which they prescribe. The child, who has passed the verge of moral agency, is not placed beneath their regulation; and whatever virtue he may exercise, is no other than a fulfilment of their requisitions. All the duties which we immediately owe to God, to our fellow-creatures, and to ourselves, are by these precepts alike comprehended and required. In a word, endlessly various as moral action may be, it exists in no form or instance, in which he who perfectly obeys these precepts, will not have done his duty, and will not find himself justified and accepted by God.

3dly. *The law of God requires the best possible moral character.*

To require and accomplish this great object, an object in its importance literally immense, is supremely worthy of the wisdom and goodness of this glorious Being. To make his moral creatures virtuous, is unquestionably the only method of rendering them really and extensively useful, and laying the only solid foundation for their enduring happiness. But all virtue is summed up in the fulfilment of these two commands; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; and thy neighbour as thyself.* In doing this every individual becomes as amiable, excellent, dignified, and useful, as with his own capacity he can be. Should he advance in his capacity through endless duration, all the good which he will ever do; all the honour which he will ever render to his Creator; all the excellence, amiableness, and dignity, which he will ever acquire; will be nothing but obedience to these two commands. The beauty and glory of the evangelical character; the rapturous flame which glows in the breast of a seraph; the transcendent exaltation of an archangel; is completely included in *loving God with all the heart, and his neighbour as himself.* Nay, the infinite loveliness, the supreme glory, of the Godhead, is no other than this disposition, boundlessly exerted in the uncreated mind, and producing, in an unlimited extent, and an eternal succession, its proper and divine effects on the intelligent universe. *God,* saith St. John, *is love.*

4thly. *The law of God proposes and accomplishes the best possible end.*

The only ultimate good is happiness: by which I intend *enjoyment;* whether springing from the mind itself, or flowing into it from external sources. Perfect happiness is perfect good; or, in other words, includes whatever is desirable: and this is the good which the divine law proposes, as its own proper and supreme end.

This end is with exact propriety divisible and is customarily divided into two great parts: the first usually termed *the glory of God:* the second, *the happiness of the intelligent creation.*

The original and essential glory of God, is his ability and disposition to accomplish perfect happiness. This is

his inherent, unchangeable, and eternal perfection. But the glory of God, to which I refer, is what is often called *his declarative glory;* and is no other, than *this very perfection manifested in his conduct, immediately by himself, and mediately in their conduct, by the intelligent creation.* In this sense, the glory of God is proposed and accomplished by his law, when he prescribes to his intelligent creatures, and produces in them a disposition to *love him with all the heart, and each other as themselves.* This disposition is beyond all estimation the most lovely, the most excellent, the most glorious work of the Creator's hands; incomparably the greatest proof of his sufficiency and inclination to effectuate perfect good; and therefore infinitely honourable to his character. In the exercise of this disposition, on their part, and in its genuine effects, they render to him also, voluntarily and directly, all the honour which can be rendered to the infinite mind by intelligent creatures.

At the same time, *the divine law is the source of perfect happiness to them.* Voluntary beings are the only original sources of happiness: and *virtue,* which is nothing but this disposition, is in them the only productive cause of happiness. Under the influence of it, all beings in whom it prevails unite to do the utmost good in their power. The good therefore, which is actually done by them, is the greatest good, which can be derived from the efforts of intelligent creatures. As in this manner they become perfectly lovely, praiseworthy, and rewardable, in the sight of God; he *can,* with the utmost propriety, and therefore certainly *will* reward them, by actually communicating to them the most exalted happiness of which they are capable. The kingdom of glory in the heavens, with its endless and providential dispensations, will, to saints and angels, constitute this reward.

I have mentioned *the glory of God as the first great division of the perfect end proposed by the divine law. The glory of God is that in which his happiness consists; the object infinitely enjoyed by the infinite mind;* the sufficiency for all good, not only existing and enjoyed by contemplation, but operating also and enjoyed in its genuine and proper effects.

It ought to be observed, that there are no other possible

means of accomplishing this illustrious end, beside this disposition. Intelligent beings are the only beings by whom God can be thus glorified. They are the only beings who can understand either his character or his works; or perceive the glory which he directly manifests in them. They are also the only beings who can render to him love, reverence, or obedience; and thus honour his character in such a manner as this can be done by creatures. Without them the universe, with all its furniture and splendour, would still be a solitude.

At the same time, intelligent beings alone either produce or enjoy happiness in any great degree.

But there is no other disposition in such beings beside this, which can voluntarily glorify God, or produce important and enduring happiness. It is hardly necessary for me to observe that no obedience, and no regard whatever, rendered by rational creatures to God, can be of any value, or in any degree amiable or acceptable, except that which is voluntary; or that towards beings who did not love him, he could not exercise any complacency. It is scarcely more necessary to observe, that beings who did not voluntarily produce happiness, could neither enjoy it themselves, nor yield it to others. The seat of happiness is the mind; and the first or original happiness which it finds, is ever found in its own approbation of its conduct, and the delightful nature of its affections. But no mind can be self-approved, which does not first love God and its fellow-creatures; and no affections can be delightful, except those which spring from the same disposition. *Its views of God, and its affections towards him, its apprehensions of his complacency towards itself, and its enjoyment of his blessings, constitute the second great division of its happiness.* But no mind can have delightful views of God, or delightful affections towards him; or be the object of his complacency; except that which loves him supremely. *The third great division of this subject consists in the esteem, the love, and the kind offices, mutually interchanged by rational beings.* It is perfectly obvious, that these can never exist in any material degree, where the second command of this law is not cordially obeyed. But the mind influenced by *the love which is the fulfilling of the law,* is self-approved by God and by

proved by its fellow-creatures. All its affections also towards itself, its Creator, and the intelligent universe, are delightful. At the same time, all its actions are productive of glory to the Creator, and of good to his creation.

Thus the law of God, by laying hold on this single great principle, has directed the whole energy of the mind to the production of the best of all ends, in the best possible manner.

REMARKS.

From these observations it appears,

1st. *That the law of God is, and must of necessity be, unchangeable and eternal.*

Our Saviour informs us, that *heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than one jot or one tittle of the law shall fail.* This declaration has, I presume, seemed extraordinary to every reader of the New Testament. To many it has, in all probability, appeared incredible. But, if I mistake not, these observations furnish us, not only with ample evidence of its truth, but with ample reasons why it should be true. A law, which is the result of infinite wisdom and goodness; which is perfectly fitted to the state and capacity of intelligent creatures; which requires the best possible moral character; which proposes and accomplishes the best possible end; and without which neither the glory of God, nor the happiness of the intelligent creation, could be established or perpetuated; plainly cannot and ought not to be changed. Were God to change it, he must change it for the worse; from a perfect law to an imperfect one. Whatever rule he should prescribe in its place, for the conduct of his moral creatures, must require something which is wrong, or fail to require something which is right. Neither of these could be just, or wise, or good. Nor could his wisdom, justice, or goodness, be manifested, or even preserved, in the establishment of such a law; much less in annulling a perfect law, and substituting an imperfect one in its place. To give up this law, would be to sacrifice his own glory, and the happiness of his intelligent creation. These united, constitute the very end for which the heavens and the earth were made. In the case supposed therefore,

the heavens and the earth would exist to no purpose; that is, to no purpose worthy of JEHOVAH.

2dly. *This subject furnishes us with one affecting view of the evil of sin.*

Sin is a transgression of the law: that is, sin is the disposition of the heart, and the conduct of the life, directly opposed to what the law requires. It is directly opposed to the decisions of infinite wisdom and goodness; to the best possible character; and to the best possible end; the glory of God, and the supreme good of the intelligent creation. Of all these the law is either the transcript, or the indispensable means. So far as sin has power to operate, it operates to their destruction; and its native tendency would prevent the glory of God, and the good of the universe.

The evil of sin does not lie in the power of the sinner to accomplish his evil designs; but in the nature of the designs themselves, and the disposition which gave them birth; and must ever bear some general proportion to the extent of the mischief which it would accomplish if it were permitted to operate without restraint. From what has been said it is plain, that this mischief transcends all finite comprehension. The evil, therefore, which is inherent in it, must be incalculably great.

We see this truth verified in the present world. All the misery suffered here is the effect of sin. Sin blotted out the bliss of Paradise; and established in its place private wretchedness and public suffering. The smile of complacency it changed into the gloomy frown of wrath and malice. For the embrace of friendship it substituted the attack of the assassin. The song of joy it converted into a groan of anguish: the ascription of praise it commuted for the blasphemies of impiety. What then must be the evils which it would accomplish, were it let loose upon the universe; were it to invade the kingdom of glory, as it once intruded into Eden; and ravage eternity, as it has ravaged the little periods of time?

3dly. *We learn from this subject the absurdity of antinomianism.*

Two of the prominent antinomian doctrines are, *that the*

law of God is not a rule of duty to Christians; and that the transgressions of it by Christians are not sins.

Sin, saith St. John, *is the transgression of the law.* It is a bold assertion, then, an assertion demanding a warrant which can be pleaded by no man; that *there is such a thing, or that there can be such a thing, as a transgression of the law which is not sinful.* Why are not the transgressions of Christians sinful? Is it because they are holy beings? Adam was perfectly holy; yet one transgression of his ruined the world. Angels were perfectly holy, in a state far superior to that of Adam; yet one transgression of theirs turned them out of heaven! Is it because Christians are redeemed? The mercy of God, displayed in their redemption, only increases their obligation to obey, and therefore enhances every transgression. Is it because God has promised, that they shall persevere, and that they shall be saved? This promise is an exercise of divine mercy; has exactly the *same* influence; and, in the case supposed, can produce no other effect. Why then are the transgressions of Christians not sinful? To this question they will in vain search for an answer.

Why is the law no longer a rule of righteousness to Christians? Is it because they are no longer under its condemning sentence? For this very reason they are under increased obligations to obey its precepts. Is it because they are placed under a *better* rule, or a *worse* one? A better rule cannot exist: a worse, God would not prescribe. Are not Christians required to glorify God? Are they not bound to promote the happiness of each other, and their fellow-men? Are they not required to conform to the dictates of infinite wisdom and goodness; to sustain the best moral character; and to fulfil the true end of their being? *To love God with all the heart*, and *their neighbour as themselves*, is to do all these things in the manner most pleasing, and in the only manner which is pleasing, to God.

To remove a Christian from the obligation which he is under to obey the law of God, is to remove him from all obligation to perform any part of his duty as a rational being to God, or to his fellow-creatures; for every part of this duty is required by the divine law. In other words, it is to discharge him from all obligation to be virtuous.

What end must we then suppose Christians are intended to answer, while they continue in the world? Certainly, none worthy of God; none worthy of the mediation of Christ; none worthy of the Christian character.

Antinomians forget, that *he who is born of God, loveth God, and knoweth God; that he who loveth not, knoweth not God; and that this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.* They forget, that Christ died *to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

4thly. *We are here furnished with one interesting proof of the divine revelation of the Scriptures.*

It is perfectly obvious to all who hear me, that a book professing to be a revelation must, whether false or true, depend in a great measure on its own internal character for evidence of its divine origin. The things which it contains must be such as become the character of God. Many of them may be mysterious and inexplicable; because the nature of the subjects may be such as to transcend the human comprehension, or lie beyond the reach of human investigation. There are subjects also of which it may be necessary to know a part; and that part, though sufficiently disclosed, if considered *by itself* only, may yet be connected with others, whose existence it will indicate, but whose nature it will not at all disclose. When subjects of this kind are presented to us, we may, if we are disposed to inquire into them extensively, be easily perplexed, and easily lost.

But whatever is revealed must *consist with the character of God*, or it cannot be admitted as a revelation. Some things also, contained in a real revelation, must be plainly *worthy of their Author, and not merely not unworthy;* must be honourable to his character, superior to the discoveries of the human mind, and such as cannot be reasonably believed to have been the inventions of men.

Perfectly correspondent with all these remarks is the law under contemplation. This truth will advantageously appear by a comparison of it with the most perfect human laws. I shall select for this purpose those of Great Britain.

The *statute laws* of that kingdom are contained, if I mis-

take not, in about eighteen or twenty folio, or about fifty octavo volumes. The *common*, or, as it is sometimes styled, the *unwritten law*, occupies a number of volumes far greater. To understand them is a work of deep science; the employment of the first human talents; and the labour of a life. The great body of them can never be known by the generality of men; and must, therefore, be very imperfect rules of their conduct.

In the mean time, multitudes of cases are continually occurring which they do not reach at all. Those which they actually reach, they affect in many instances injuriously; and in many more imperfectly. The system of happiness which they propose is extremely defective; a bare state of tolerable convenience, and even that attended with many abatements. They also extend their influence only to a speck of earth, and a moment of time. Yet these laws were devised, reviewed, and amended, by persons of the first human consideration for learning and wisdom.

The law which *we* have been examining, is comprised in two commands only; is so short, so intelligible, so capable of being remembered and applied, as to be perfectly fitted to the understanding and use of every moral being. At the same time it is so comprehensive, as to reach perfectly every possible moral action, to preclude every wrong, and to secure every right. It is equally fitted to men and angels, to earth and heaven. Its control extends with the same efficacy and felicity to all worlds, and to all periods. It governs the universe; it reaches through eternity. The system of happiness proposed and accomplished by it, is perfect, endless, and for ever progressive. Must not candour, must not prejudice itself, confess with the magicians of Egypt, that here *is the finger of God?*

But if this is from God, the Scriptures must be acknowledged to have the same origin. In the Scriptures alone is this law contained. Nay, the Scriptures themselves are chiefly this law expanded into more minute precepts, and more multiplied applications; enforced by happy comments, and illustrated by useful examples; especially the example presented to us in the perfect and glorious life of the SON OF GOD.

SERMON XCII.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT. LOVE TO GOD.

And one of the Scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceived that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? and Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.—MARK XII. 28—30.

IN the last discourse I made a number of general observations on *the perfection of the divine law.* I shall now proceed to consider, somewhat more particularly, *the nature and import of the first and greatest commandment of that law; the command which regulates our piety to God.*

In the text we are informed, that a Scribe, a man learned in the Scriptures and accustomed to expound them to others, pleased with Christ's refutation of the Sadducees, and the proofs which he had unanswerably given of a future existence, asked him, *Which is the first commandment of all?* that is, the first in rank, obligation, and importance. Christ, quoting Deut. vi. 4, informs him, that the first command, in this sense, is, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.*

In this command, it is to be observed, there is one thing only required; and that is *love.* It is, however, *love in a comprehensive sense;* including several exercises of the mind, easily and customarily distinguished from each other; as might indeed be naturally expected from the phraseology of the command.

It is farther to be observed, that the love here enjoined is required to exist in such a degree as to occupy the whole heart, the whole soul, the whole mind, and the whole strength. The word here rendered *soul,* seems originally to have been used to denote *the principle of animal life,* and to have been commonly used in this sense by the Greeks; as the two corresponding words of their respective languages were by the Jews and Romans. The word translated *mind,* is commonly used to denote the *understanding;* and seems plainly to have been used in this manner here, since the Scribe expresses this as the meaning of it in his answer. The import of this command may then be stated thus: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thine understanding,* and *with all thy strength, throughout all thy life.* In other words, we are required, under the influence of this disposition, to devote, throughout our lives, all our faculties and services to the glory of Jehovah. Our hearts and voices, our understanding and our hands, are to be entirely and voluntarily dedicated to his service.

I have already observed, that *love,* in this comprehensive sense, includes several exercises of the mind, easily and customarily distinguished. It will be one object of this discourse to exhibit them with this distinction.

1st. *Love to God, as required by this command, is good-will to him, his designs, and interests.*

By *good-will,* in this case, I intend the very same benevolence formerly described as one of the attendants of regeneration, and then mentioned as extending to the Creator and his intelligent creatures. Not a small number of divines have supposed, that love in this sense is neither required nor exerted towards the Creator. "God," say they, "being supremely and eternally blessed; and the success of his designs, and the prosperity of his interests, being perfectly secured by his power, knowledge, and presence; there can be no necessity nor room for any exercise of our good-will towards *him* or *them.* Benevolence is with propriety exercised towards man, because he needs it; but cannot with any such propriety be exercised towards God, who is so far from *needing any thing,* that *he gives unto all life, and breath, and all things.*

These observations are undoubtedly specious: yet the reasoning contained in them is totally erroneous; and the conclusion intended to be derived from them false and mistaken. To admit it, is to give up the first duty of man.

Benevolence depends not, either for its obligation or exercise, on the supposition, that the person towards whom it may be directed, needs either our benevolence or its effects. Happiness, its immediate object, is always and every where supremely delightful and desirable in itself; delightful, whenever it exists; desirable, whenever it may exist hereafter. The greater the degree in which it exists, or may exist hereafter, the more delightful, the more desirable, must it be of course. It is desirable, that two persons should be happy, other things being equal, rather than one; twenty than two; a hundred than twenty. It is in a continually increasing proportion desirable, that a person should be twice as happy as he is at present; ten times; a hundred times. On the same grounds it is delightful to find happiness existing in one degree; more delightful in two; and still more in twenty or a hundred. To delight in happiness in this manner, is in the same manner to exercise good-will towards the being who is thus happy.

The *happiness*, or *blessedness of God*, as it is more commonly termed, is no other than *his enjoyment of his own perfect attributes, and of the effects produced by them in that glorious system of good*, which is begun in the *work of creation, and will be completed in the work of providence*: or, in other words, *his sufficiency for accomplishing, the certainty that he will accomplish, and the actual accomplishment of, a perfect system of good.* This is an object infinitely desirable to the divine mind. Were it to fail, this desire would be ungratified; and the divine mind would be proportionally unhappy.

To this it will be objected, as it often has been, that "*this doctrine makes God dependant for his happiness on his creatures.*"

This objection is a mistake. The doctrine involves no such dependance. The independence of God consists not at all in the fact, that he will be happy whether his designs will be accomplished or not; but in his sufficiency for the absolute accomplishment of them all; and in the absolute

certainty, that they will be thus accomplished. His power, wisdom, and goodness, are this sufficiency; and yield him intuitive certainty of this accomplishment. These things constitute the most perfect possible independence.

Were God without desires; had he no choice, no pleasure; he could enjoy no happiness. Were he unable to fulfil his pleasure, or uncertain whether it would be fulfilled, he would be dependant. But, according to this statement, his happiness and his independence are both absolute.

The designs of God are infinitely desirable, because they involve the display of his infinite perfections, in their perfect exercise, and in the accomplishment of a perfect system of good. In this manner they present to us the most glorious of all objects, operating in the most glorious manner, to the production of the most glorious purpose. This object is, with the highest evidence, infinitely desirable and delightful. At the same time, the happiness which God enjoys in the exercise of his perfections, and in the accomplishment of this divine end, is a happiness not only infinitely desirable and delightful to himself, but desirable in the same manner to all intelligent creatures. All intelligent creatures, possessed of real benevolence, cannot fail to rejoice, that God is, and ever will be, thus infinitely happy; that these glorious designs will certainly be accomplished; that he will ever thus act; and that he will ever find infinite enjoyment in thus acting. It is as truly desirable, that God should be thus happy, as it is that any of his intelligent creatures should be happy; and as much more desirable, as he is happier than they.

But to delight in this happiness, is to exercise towards God the benevolence of the gospel. I flatter myself, that to exercise this benevolence, has been amply proved to be an unquestionable and supreme duty of man.

2dly. *Love to God is complacency in his character.*

It has been shewn, in several former discourses, that God is infinitely benevolent; in other words, he is infinitely disposed to desire and perform that which is good in the highest degree. In other words, he is infinitely just, faithful, true, kind, bountiful, and merciful. Such a character is infinitely excellent in itself; and demands, in the highest

possible degree, the supreme approbation, and the supreme complacency, of every intelligent creature.

Benevolence, as here required, *is a delight in the happiness of God: complacency is a delight in his excellence.* The excellence of God contains in itself all that wisdom can approve; all that virtue can love; all that is meant by the excellence and amiableness, by the beauty and glory, of mind; by moral dignity and greatness. This is what God himself esteems his own supreme perfection, and the transcendent glory of his character. Accordingly, when he proclaimed his *name* to Moses, on mount Sinai, he proclaimed this part of his character only; and styled it the name, or glory, of Jehovah.

I know not, that to love God, *in this sense*, has ever been denied or doubted to be a Christian duty, by such as have believed in the Scriptures. On the contrary, it has been commonly supposed, that complacency and gratitude were the only love to God required in his law. The happiness of God has usually been considered as so secure, so independent, and so perfect, as that, while he needs nothing from the hands of his creatures to increase or ensure it, he also may be justly regarded as claiming nothing from *them*, with respect to this subject. His perfections, at the same time, are so manifest, and so absolute, as to fill the mind with reverence and amazement, and engross all its attention and thoughts. In this manner, probably, the regard of mankind, and even of wise and good men, has been so effectually drawn away from the consideration of the happiness of God, to the consideration of his excellence, that they seem chiefly to have forgotten the former of these objects, and have been almost wholly occupied by the latter. At the same time, it cannot be denied, that to delight in the excellence of God, is a duty *more obvious* to the mind, than to delight in his happiness. A little reflection will, however, convince us, and I hope it has already been clearly shewn, that it is not a *more indispensable* duty. It is plainly not our original duty. It is plainly not virtue, or moral excellence, *in the original sense*. *This* is unquestionably *the love of happiness*. *Complacency* is *the love of this virtue*, or *moral excellence*. But that excellence must

exist before it can be loved. The contrary supposition is a palpable absurdity; to which all those reduce themselves, who insist that *complacency is original virtue.*

3dly. *The love of God is gratitude.*

Gratitude is *love to God for the particular manifestations of his glorious character, in his various kindness to us and to ours. We,* and perhaps all other intelligent beings, are so formed, as to be able more clearly to see, and more strongly to feel, blessings, immediately bestowed on ourselves, and on those intimately connected with us, whose characters and wants, whose sorrows and joys, we peculiarly understand and feel, than those bestowed on others. As we feel, universally, what is ours, and what pertains to our connexions, more, other things being equal, than what pertains to those whose interests we less understand, and in whose concerns we are less in the habit of mingling; so we feel, of course, more deeply the blessings which *we* and *they* receive; the deliverances, hopes, comforts, joys; than we do or can those of others. Our near connexions are our second selves; and there is sometimes as little difference, and sometimes even less, between us and them, in our views and feelings, than between them and others. Nay, there are cases in which we feel the interests of our connexions no less than our own. A parent would often willingly suffer the distresses of a child, in order to accomplish relief for him; and often rejoices more in his prosperity, than if it were his own.

There is perhaps no solid reason in the nature of things, why God should be loved more for the manifestation of goodness towards one being, than for the same manifestation towards another. Still, with our present dispositions, those acts of his benevolence which respect ourselves, will always perhaps appear more amiable than those which respect others.

Gratitude therefore, or love to God for the communications of blessings to ourselves, and to those in whose well-being we find a direct and peculiar interest, is an affection of the mind in some respects distinct from complacency; an affection which must and ought to exist in this world. As we can love God more for blessings thus bestowed, than for those bestowed on others; so we ought to seize every

occasion to exercise this love, to the utmost of our power; and such occasions enable us to exercise it in a superior degree.

Possibly, in a future world, and a higher state of existence, all the blessings of God, communicated to rational beings, may affect us as if communicated to ourselves; and our complacency in his character may universally become possessed of the whole intenseness and ardour of gratitude.

Gratitude, considered as a virtue, it is always to be remembered, *is love excited by kindness communicated, or believed to be communicated, with virtuous and good designs, and from good motives; not for kindness bestowed for base and selfish ends.* In every case of this nature, the kindness professed is merely pretended and hypocritical. The bestower terminates all his views in his own advantage; and has no ultimate regard to the benefit of the receiver.

The kindness of God is invariably communicated with the best of all designs and motives; designs and motives infinitely good; and is therefore a display of a character infinitely excellent. Hence it is always to be regarded with gratitude. The good bestowed is also the highest good: and therefore the highest gratitude is due to the bestower.

Of precepts requiring all these exercises of love, and prohibiting the want of them; of examples by which they are gloriously illustrated; of motives, promises, and rewards, by which they are divinely encouraged; the Scriptures are full. Particularly, the *good-will* of the Psalmist to the infinitely great and glorious Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, of the universe, is manifested every where throughout his sacred songs. Every where he rejoices in the designs and actions of JEHOVAH: in the certain accomplishment of his designs; in the infinite glory which he will derive from them all; in the prosperity of his kingdom; and in the joy which he experiences in all the works of his hands.

Equally does he express his *complacency* in the perfect character of God; his wisdom, power, goodness, truth, faithfulness, and mercy; as displayed in his works and word, in his law and gospel.

Nor is he less abundant in his effusions of *gratitude* for

all the divine goodness to himself and his family, to the people of Israel and the church of God. In expressing these emotions, he is ardent, intense, sublime, and rapturous; an illustrious example to all who have come after him of the manner in which we should feel, and in which we should express, our love to God.

Like him, the prophet Isaiah, the apostle Paul, and generally all the scriptural writers, in works not directly devotional, but doctrinal and preceptive, exhibit, with corresponding ardour and sublimity, these most excellent dispositions. It is hardly necessary to add, that our own emotions and expressions ought to be of the same general nature.

Having thus exhibited, summarily, the nature of love to God in these three great exercises, I will now proceed to allege several reasons which demand of us these exercises of piety.

1st. *This service is highly reasonable, beautiful, and amiable, in intelligent creatures.*

God, from the considerations mentioned in this discourse, presents to us, in his blessedness, in his excellence, and in his communications of good, all possible reasons and all possible degrees, why we should exercise towards him our supreme benevolence, complacency, and gratitude. His enjoyment is the sum of all happiness; his character the sum of all perfection; and his communications of good, the amount of all the blessings found in the universe. These united constitute an object assembling in itself, comparatively speaking, all natural and moral beauty, glory, and excellence; whatever can be desired, esteemed, or loved.

2dly. *God infinitely loves himself.*

The conduct of God is, in every case, the result of views and dispositions perfectly wise, and just, and good; and becomes, wherever they can imitate it, a perfect rule to direct the conduct of his intelligent creatures. In this case, the rule is as perfect as any other: and in this case, as well as every other, it is the highest honour, and the consummate rectitude, of all intelligent creatures, to resemble their Creator. So far as we resemble him, we are secure of being right, excellent, and lovely.

At the same time, so far as we are like him, we are as-

sured of his approbation and love, and of receiving from his hands all the good which our real interests require. As he loves himself, he cannot but love his resemblance, wherever it is found.

3dly. *In this conduct we unite with all virtuous beings.*

This is the very conduct which especially constitutes them virtuous, and without which their virtue, *in every other sense*, would cease to exist. For this they love and approve themselves: for this they will approve and love us. By these exercises of piety, then, we become, at once, entirely, and for ever, members of their glorious assembly; secure of their esteem, friendship, and kind offices: and entitled, of course, to a participation of their divine and immortal enjoyment. The best friends, the most delightful companions, the most honourable connexions, which the universe contains, or will ever contain, are in this manner made throughout the ages of our endless being.

4thly. *We unite with God, and the virtuous universe, in voluntarily promoting that supreme good, which by his own perfections, and their instrumentality, he has begun to accomplish.*

This work is literally divine; the supreme, the only, display of divine excellence, which ever has been, or ever will be, made; an immense and eternal kingdom of virtue and happiness: all that wisdom can approve, or virtue desire To engage in it, is to engage in the best of all employments. To choose it, is to exhibit the best of all characters. It is to choose, what God himself chooses; to pursue, what he pursues; to act, as he acts; and to be *fellow-workers together with him* in the glorious edifice of eternal good. The disposition required in this command, is the same which in him, and in all his virtuous creatures, originated, advances, and will complete, this divine building in its ever-growing stability, beauty, and splendour.

5thly. *We secure and enjoy the greatest happiness.*

Love to God is a disposition inestimably sweet and delightful; delightful in itself; delightful in its operations; delightful in its effects. All the exercises of it are, in their own nature, and while they are passing, a series of exquisite enjoyments. They operate only to good; and are therefore highly pleasurable in all their various tendency.

Their effects, both within and without the soul, are either pure, unmingled happiness, directly enjoyed by ourselves; or a similar happiness first enjoyed by others, and then returning to ourselves with a doubly endeared and charming reversion.

This disposition leads us unceasingly to contemplate the most exalted, wonderful, and delightful objects; the things which God has already done, is daily accomplishing, and has disclosed to us in his promises as hereafter to be accomplished. Contemplation on the works of God, when they are regarded as being his works, is capable of furnishing us with dignified and intense enjoyment. To produce this effect, however, it is indispensable, that we should view them under the influence of this disposition. The mind can experience no pleasure in contemplating the actions of a being whom it does not love. Love to God opens the gates of enjoyment; and of all enjoyment furnished by the works of creation and providence, so far as it springs from the consideration, that they are *his* works. Through this enjoyment it conducts the mind to others; and to others still in a train which knows no end. Wherever we are or can be delighted with displays of boundless wisdom and boundless goodness, with the perfect efforts of a perfect character, love to God is the guide which conducts us to the divine possession.

Beyond this, he who created us for this glorious purpose, and who delights to see it accomplished, cannot fail to be pleased with us while engaged in it; and therefore will not fail to reward us with his blessings. In this path then we ascend to the divine favour; *see the good of his chosen; enjoy the gladness of his nation;* and share *the glory of his inheritance.* Eternal glory then is the natural, the necessary, result of love to God. Indeed, eternal glory is nothing but his eternal and unchangeable love to us, and our eternal and unchanging love to him; united with the same love, extended, and reciprocated, among all virtuous beings. In the world to come, this divine disposition will become more and more sweet and delightful; and in every mind be, in the beautiful language of our Saviour, *a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life.*

6thly. *Without love to God, there can be no virtue, or moral excellence.*

Love is a single character; uniform in its nature, and in no way separable, even in contemplation, except merely as it is exercised towards different objects. These give it all those which are considered as its different forms. In all these forms it is exercised by the same man, in exactly the same manner. If it be found in one of these forms, in any mind, it is of course found in the same mind, in every other form, whenever the object which gives it that form is presented to that mind. Thus he, who possesses *benevolence*, when *happiness* is the object present to him, exercises *complacency* whenever he contemplates *moral excellence;* and *gratitude*, whenever he turns his thoughts towards a *benefactor*. Thus also he who loves God, loves his fellow-creatures of course; and, of course, governs himself with evangelical moderation and self-denial. In all these exercises of the mind, and all others of a virtuous nature, a single indivisible disposition exists and operates. This disposition is the love required by the divine law; *the love* which St. Paul declares to be *the fulfilling of the law;* not love of various kinds; not a train of dispositions diversified in their nature, and springing up successively as new objects are presented to the mind: but love of exactly the same nature, diversified only by being exercised towards different objects.

This disposition is the only real excellence of mind. There is no ultimate good but happiness; and no disposition originally good, but that which rejoices in it, and voluntarily promotes it. Benevolence is, therefore, the only original excellence of mind; and is the foundation of all the real excellence of complacency and gratitude; which are only subordinate forms or exercises of the same character.

7thly. *A higher nobler state of being is enjoyed by him who loves God, than can possibly be enjoyed by any other.*

God is the origin and residence of all that is great or good in the universe. All other greatness and goodness are mere emanations from the greatness and goodness of JEHOVAH. To have no delight in these glorious attributes,

boundlessly existing in the infinite mind, is to be destitute of the noblest and best of all views and affections; of affections and views, fitted in their own nature to improve, ennoble, refine, and enrapture, the mind; and to form it into a most honourable resemblance to the sum of all perfection. Without this disposition, we are sinners; enemies to God; spots in his kingdom; and nuisances to the universe: are debased, guilty, and hateful, here; and shall be endlessly guilty and miserable hereafter.

8thly. *In this manner we obey God:*

God, *whose we are, and whom we are bound to serve,* has been pleased to express his pleasure to the intelligent universe, in these two commands. He, who published them, is our Maker, our Preserver, and our Benefactor. We are his property; created by his hand; formed for his use; made for his glory. His right to dispose of us according to his pleasure is, therefore, supreme; and such as cannot be questioned. It is a right of course, which, although so exercised as to demand of us very great and long-continued self-denial, is ever to be submissively, patiently, and cheerfully, acknowledged by us. Whatever God is pleased to require us to do or to suffer, we are to do with delight, and suffer with absolute resignation. I do not mean that we can be required, either with justice or propriety, to do or to suffer any thing which is unjust or wrong. To require this of intelligent creatures, is literally impossible for a mind infinitely perfect. But I mean, that whatever this perfect and great Being actually requires, we are absolutely bound to do, or suffer, in this manner.

At the same time, it is a source of unceasing satisfaction and delight, *to discern, from the nature of the subject itself, that all which is actually required is holy, just, and good;* supremely honourable to him, and supremely beneficial to his intelligent creatures. This, I flatter myself, has been sufficiently shewn in this and the preceding discourses. It is delightful, while we are employed in obeying God, to perceive immediately, that our conduct is in all respects desirable; the most desirable, the most amiable, the most delightful, of all possible conduct: in a word, the only conduct which really deserves these epithets.

Obedience to a parent possessed of peculiar wisdom and

goodness, is, to every dutiful child, delightful in itself; not only, when the thing required by him is in its own nature pleasing; but also when it is indifferent, and even when it is difficult and painful. The pleasure enjoyed, is in a great measure independent of that which is done; and consists, primarily, in the delightful nature of those affections which are exercised in obeying, and in the satisfaction of pleasing him whom we obey, by the respect and love manifested in our obedience. The Parent of the universe is possessed of infinite wisdom and goodness. To please him therefore is supremely desirable and delightful. But the only conduct in which we can possibly please him, is our obedience; and our only obedience is to *love him with all the heart, and our neighbour as ourselves.*

Thus, whether we regard *ourselves,* and wish to be virtuous, excellent, honourable, and happy; or whether we regard *our fellow-creatures,* and wish to render them happy, to unite with them in a pure and eternal friendship, to receive unceasingly their esteem and kind offices; and to add our efforts to theirs for the promotion of the universal good: or whether we regard GOD; and desire to obey, to please, and to glorify him; to coincide voluntarily with the designs formed by his boundless wisdom and goodness; and to advance with our own cordial exertions the divine and immortal ends which he is accomplishing; we shall make it our chief object to *love the Lord our God with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and with all the understanding.*

SERMON XCIII.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT. REVERENCE OF GOD.

And unto man he said, The fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.—JOB XXVIII. 28.

IN the last discourse I examined *the nature of love to God*, as manifested in those three great exercises of it, which are commonly spoken of under this name: viz. *benevolence, complacency,* and *gratitude.* I shall now consider another exercise of this affection, of sufficient magnitude to claim a particular discussion in a system of theology. This is *reverence to the same glorious Being.*

The context is a eulogium on *wisdom;* uttered in the noblest spirit of poetry. After describing, in a variety of particulars, the surprising effects of human ingenuity, and declaring that, extraordinary as these may seem, the ingenuity which has produced them, is utterly insufficient to discover the nature of this glorious attainment; Job asserts its value to be greater than any and than all the most precious things which this world contains. In this state of human insufficiency he informs us, God was pleased to interfere, and by a direct revelation to declare to man, that *the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*

By *wisdom* throughout the Scriptures, in the common language of such men as understand the meaning of their own language, is universally intended, *that conduct in which the best means are selected to accomplish the best ends;* or *the Spirit which chooses these ends, and selects these means for their accomplishment.* In *the former* case the name refers to the *conduct only; in the latter* to *the character.* The best of all ends which it is possible for intelligent creatures to pursue, is the combined and perfectly coincident one of

glorifying God, and promoting the good of the universe. The Spirit with which this is done in the only effectual manner, is that which is here styled *the fear of the Lord.* The means by which it is done, are partly the Spirit itself, in its various exercises and operations; and partly extraneous means devised and employed by the same Spirit.

A subordinate but still very important end, which is or ought to be proposed to himself by every intelligent creature, and for which the most efficacious means ought to be employed by him, is *his own eternal happiness. The fear of the Lord is* equally *wisdom* in this view; as being the only disposition which can either be happy in itself, or receive its proper reward from God.

Every person who has read the Scriptures of the Old Testament, must have observed, that this phrase, *the fear of the Lord,* and others substantially involving the same words as well as the same meaning, are oftener used to denote the moral character which is acceptable to God, than any, perhaps than all, other phrases whatever. It must also have struck every such reader, that this phrase is often used to denote all moral excellence: particularly that supreme branch of this excellence which is denominated piety. This is plainly the drift of the text; and of many other corresponding passages of Scripture. Thus it is said, *the fear of the Lord is the beginning,* or the chief part, *of wisdom.* Psal. cxi. 10. *The fear of the Lord is the fountain of life.* Prov. xiv. 27. *The fear of the Lord is his treasure.* Is. xxxiii. 6. In these and a multitude of other declarations of a similar import, it is plainly indicated, that *the fear of the Lord* is the sum and substance of that morally excellent character which is the object of the divine complacency.

It must, at the same time, be equally obvious to every attentive reader of the Bible, that *love to God* has there exactly the same character: being, in the language of St. Paul, *the fulfilling of the law;* and in that of St. John, the same thing as *being born of God, and knowing God;* in the sense in which such knowledge is declared by our Saviour to be *life eternal.*

But there are not *two distinct moral characters* severally thus excellent; thus the objects of the divine complacency

and the foundations of eternal life. Moral excellence is *one thing*; and moral beings have but *one character* which recommends them to God. As this is thus differently spoken of under the names of *the love of God*, and *the fear of God*, both in the Old and New Testament; it is sufficiently evident to a mind even slightly attentive, that *the fear of God*, and *the love of God*, are but one character, appearing under different modifications. Accordingly, saints or holy persons are spoken of sometimes as those who fear God, and sometimes as those who love God: each of these exercises being considered as involving the other; and both as parts only of one character.

That this view of the subject is perfectly just, is easily explained by a consideration of its nature. There are two totally distinct exercises, which in the Scriptures, as well as in common language, are denoted by fearing God; which may be called *dread* and *reverence*. The former of these emotions is that which is experienced by men conscious of their guilt, feeling that they have merited the anger of God, and realizing the danger of suffering from his hand the punishment of their sins. In *this* it is plain that there can be no moral excellence. All that can be said in favour of it is, that it may serve as a check to sin; and prove, among other means, useful to bring sinners to repentance. In itself it is mere terror; and, in the language of the Scriptures, only makes us *subject to bondage*. The latter of these emotions is a compound of fear and love, usually styled reverence; and is often that exercise of the mind in which its whole attachment is exerted towards God. *Fear*, in this sense, is *a strong apprehension of the greatness and the purity of God, excited in the mind of a person who loves him supremely*. A lively example of a similar emotion is presented to us by the reverence with which a dutiful child regards a highly respected earthly parent. Accordingly, the fear of God, in this sense, is commonly styled *filial*; in the former sense, it is often termed *servile*, or *slavish*; as being of the same nature with the dread which a mercenary servant stands in of an imperious master.

It is perfectly evident, that the distinction between these two emotions is founded entirely on the character of those by whom they are severally exercised. Reverence to God

is experienced only by those who love him; and is plainly the fear, exercised by an affectionate mind only. Were love the only character of the mind, dread could not possibly find a place in it. *There is no fear in love,* says St. John; *but perfect love casteth out fear. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* As Christians in this world are not made perfect in love; the fear spoken of in this passage, *viz.* that which I have called *dread,* is, in greater or less degrees, experienced by *them.* Wicked men are incapable of reverencing God; and only feel a dread of his anger and of punishment.

The reverence which is the immediate subject of consideration, ordinarily exists in the mind of a good man, whenever his contemplations are turned towards the Creator, or towards those objects which are peculiarly his, and in which he is peculiarly seen. *It is a steady, solemn, and delightful awe, excited in the mind by every view which it takes of the perfections and operations of this great and glorious Being.* In our contemplations on his character, he himself becomes *immediately* the object of our thoughts. In all other cases we see him through *the medium* of his works, his word, or his ordinances. In all these, and in these alone, are we able to discern his real character. In all these we behold him awfully great, and wise, and good. *In his works* we are witnesses of that boundless benevolence which chose, that boundless knowledge which contrived, and that boundless power which produced, their existence; all of them seen daily in every place and in every object. It is impossible for the mind which is not totally destitute of piety, to behold the sublime, the awful, the amazing works of creation and providence; the heavens with their luminaries, the mountains, the ocean, the storm, the earthquake, and the volcano; the circuit of the seasons, and the revolutions of empire; without marking in them all the mighty hand of God, and feeling strong emotions of reverence towards the Author of these stupendous works. At some of them all men tremble: at others all men are astonished. But the sanctified mind, while it is affected in the same manner, blends its fear with love, and mingles delight even with its apprehensions; is serene amid the convulsions which only terrify others; and encouraged, while all around are overwhelmed with dismay.

In the word of God, these attributes are, in some respects, exhibited in a still more affecting manner. Here the designs of this awful Being are unfolded, and his works presented to us, as a vast system of means, operating in a perfect manner to the production of the most divine and glorious ends. Here the pure and perfect rectitude of the Creator, his unlimited wisdom, and overflowing goodness, are still more divinely manifested in the law, by which he governs the universe, and in the scheme of restoring mankind to holiness by the redemption of his Son disclosed to us in the gospel. The boundless nature of these things invests them with a magnificence and sublimity wonderfully increasing the reverence excited by the things themselves; but nothing seems to me more fitted to awaken this emotion, than a sense of that spotless purity, in the view of which *the heavens are unclean, and the angels chargeable with folly.* In this solemn contemplation of this awfully amiable attribute, it seems difficult to forbear exclaiming, *What is man who drinketh iniquity like water.* The same emotion, mingled with stronger feelings of alarm, is produced also by a contemplation of those amazing events, which are proclaimed by the voice of prophecy concerning the future destination of man; the conflagration, the judgment, and the retributions of the righteous and the wicked.

In the ordinances of religion, the very same things are presented to the view of the mind which so deeply affect it in the works; and especially in the word of God; and are presented to us in a manner peculiarly interesting. Here we in a peculiar manner draw nigh to God; and apply to ourselves, with unrivalled force, the great, the awful, and the glorious things, which excite our reverence. They are of course all seen in the clearest light and felt with the deepest impression. Our reverence, therefore, is apt to be here felt in a peculiar degree; not a little enhanced, by the sympathy exercised by multitudes feeling the same impression.

No affection of the mind is more useful than this; especially when it has become so invigorated by habit as to mingle itself with all our thoughts and feelings. It cannot but be advantageous to mention particularly, some of the happy consequences which it regularly produces. As a preface to this subject it will however be proper to observe

generally, that habitual reverence to God may be justly regarded as being peculiarly the spirit with which his commandments are scrupulously and faithfully obeyed. *Fear God*, saith Solomon, *and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man:* or, in the better language of Hodgson's Version, *this is all that concerneth man.* Here we have presented to us the two great parts of human duty; our active obedience, and the spirit with which we obey. This spirit is announced by him to be reverence. He does not say, *Love God and keep his commandments*; but gives this all-comprehensive injunction in what seems to me very evidently better language. If we suppose ourselves to love God without fearing him; I have no hesitation in saying, we should not keep his commandments, while possessed of our present imperfection, either to such an extent, or with such exactness, as we now do when under the government of evangelical reverence. Reverence adds new motives of obedience to those which are presented by love considered by itself; motives pre-eminently powerful and extensive; reaching the heart immediately; and extending to all persons, occasions, and times. Hence it becomes a most powerful prompter to universal obedience: and although love is the disposition which renders this emotion excellent; and although the emotion itself is only one modification of love; yet, in my own view, and, if I mistake not, in the view of the Scriptures also, it is at least, in such beings as men are, a more energetic principle than mere love, existing, as it actually does exist, in human minds. Hence, after so much solemn preparation in the text, *The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.* Hence, St. Paul says to the Corinthians, *having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit; perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* In this passage it is evident that, in the view of St. Paul, *the fear of God* is the primary means of advancing personal holiness to perfection. It is in this view also that the prophet Isaiah declares *the fear of the Lord to be his treasure;* the attribute which in man he especially prizes, and in which he peculiarly delights.

These observations concerning the general influence of

this attribute are sufficient for the present purpose. I shall now therefore proceed to mention its particular influence on the Christian life.

1st. *Religious reverence has a peculiar tendency to render our worship acceptable to God.*

Wherefore, says St. Paul, *we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear.* In this passage the grace of God is exhibited to us as the cause which enables us to worship God acceptably: and reverence and godly fear, two names for the same disposition, as the spirit with which acceptable worship is performed. "By this spirit," says Dr. Owen, "the soul is moved and excited to spiritual care and diligence, not to provoke so great, so holy, and so jealous a God, by a neglect of that exercise of grace he requires in his service, which is due to him on account of his glorious excellences."

In accordance with this representation of the apostle, the Psalmist says, Psalm v. 7, *As for me, I will come unto thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worship towards thy holy temple.* Our Saviour also, speaking in the twenty-second psalm, says, *Ye that fear the Lord praise him; all ye seed of Jacob glorify him; and fear him all ye seed of Israel.* In the former of these passages, the Psalmist, under the influence of inspiration, teaches us that the fear of God is pre-eminently the spirit with which he would choose to perform his worship in the temple; and the spirit, of course, which he knew would render that worship acceptable to God. In the latter of these passages, our Saviour mentions those who fear God as the proper persons to be employed in his praise; and teaches us, therefore, that this is the spirit with which alone men are becomingly occupied in this solemn and delightful act of worship. At the close of the verse, he exhibits those who fear God as the persons who glorify him.

A prime part of the character given of Job is, that he feared God. Perhaps this may be alleged as the true reason why his prayers for his three friends were accepted on their behalf; for we find him, immediately before, humbling himself in the presence of God with expressions of the most profound reverence. Cornelius also seems to

have had *his prayers* as well as *his alms accepted*, because *he feared God*. A much stronger instance than these; the strongest indeed which can be supposed; is given us in Heb. v. 7, where it is said of Christ, *Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death: and was heard, in that he feared.* If this translation of the passage be admitted, as the natural meaning of the words requires; and as, notwithstanding the opinion of several commentators, seems reasonable; we are here taught that even Christ himself, on the great occasion referred to, was heard on account of the reverence with which his supplications were presented. Perhaps this extraordinary declaration was made especially to teach us, that without religious reverence no prayer can be accepted of God; and thus to render us peculiarly careful not to approach the throne of grace without emotions in a high degree reverential.

I will only add to these observations from the Scriptures, that a great part of the worship, transcribed in them from the mouths of pious men, consists in reverential sentiments and expressions.

What the Scriptures thus teach is perfectly accordant with the dictates of our reason. No views, no emotions, in us can be supposed to become the worship of God, which are not either directly reverential, or such as flow from a generally reverential state of mind. If we remember how great a being God is; that he is self-existent and independent; that he is almighty and omnipresent; that *he searches the hearts and tries the reins*; *that he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon sinners but with abhorrence*; if we think at the same time how dependant we are upon him; how little we are; how guilty; how exposed to his anger; how imperfect in our best services; and how undeserving of any acceptance, if we remember that *he is*, and that *there is none beside him*; and that not only *we*, but *all nations, are as nothing before him*; that he is *glorious in holiness, fearful in praises*, and transcendently awful in his purity: it cannot be possible for us to avoid feeling, that no thoughts, affections, or conduct, can become those who worship him, but such as are

accompanied by solemn awe and profound reverence for his perfect character; that as *his name is Holy and Reverend*, so his worship should ever be celebrated with *godly fear*.

2dly. *Religious reverence is peculiarly the means of exciting, and keeping alive, an abhorrence of sin.*

The fear of the Lord, says Solomon, or rather Christ speaking by Solomon, *is to hate evil;* Prov. viii. 13: that is, it is a part of the very nature of religious reverence to hate evil. *The transgression of the wicked saith in my heart, There is no fear of God before his eyes.* In this passage the Psalmist declares, that *the transgression of the wicked* proved to his satisfaction, that there was *no fear of God before his eyes.* Why? Plainly, because the wicked, if he feared God, would cease to transgress. Of Job it is said, *He feared God, and eschewed evil.* In this passage, we are directly taught, that he eschewed evil because he feared God. After God appeared to him with awful glory and majesty, his views of the hatefulness and vileness of his sins, were exceedingly enhanced by the clear apprehensions which he entertained of the supreme greatness and excellency of his Maker. His reverential awe of God on the one hand, and his abhorrence of himself and his sins on the other, are very forcibly exhibited in his own language. *Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

It hardly needs to be observed, that nothing can impress on our minds the odiousness of sin in such a manner, as clear and affecting views of the purity of JEHOVAH, and the reverence for him with which these views are attended; or, in better language, of which these views constitute an essential part. So entirely are mankind, at least those of them who speak our language, sensible of this; that, in judicial processes against criminals, the law constantly assigns, as a primary cause of their commission of crimes, *that they had not the fear of God before their eyes.* This is the strongest of all human testimony, that the fear of God is the great and controlling cause of hating and abstaining from iniquity. Of course

3dly. *Religious reverence is the great source of reformation.*

The fear of the Lord, says Solomon, *is to hate evil.* Prov. viii. 13. In this declaration we are taught, that reverence to God is so extensively the cause of departing from evil, that it was proper, in the view of the Spirit of God, to declare it to be the same thing with *departure from evil.* Substantially in the same manner is this truth exhibited in the text, where *the fear of the Lord* is declared to be *wisdom*, and *departure from evil understanding.* By *wisdom* and *understanding* here, it is scarcely necessary to say, the same thing is intended: and this, in the former part of the verse, is declared to be *the fear of the Lord;* and in the latter, *departure from evil. Fear the Lord*, says Solomon to his son, Prov. iii. 7, *and depart from evil.* And again, Prov. xiv. 27, *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.* And again, in language somewhat different, Prov. xiii. 14, *The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.* Here religious reverence, styled in the former passage *the fear of the Lord*, and in the latter *the law of the wise*, is declared to be *a fountain of life*, sending forth unceasing streams, of which he who drinks will be both enabled and inclined *to depart from the snares of death:* that is, from sins which are fatal snares to all who practise them.

But to depart from evil is necessarily to do good. Moral beings are by their nature always employed in obedience, or disobedience. He therefore who *ceases to do evil*, invariably *learns to do well;* is invariably employed in the great business of reforming his life, and endeavouring to glorify his Creator.

4thly. *Religious reverence is peculiarly the source of rectitude in our dispositions and conduct towards mankind.*

There was, saith our Saviour, *in a certain city, a judge, who neither feared God, nor regarded man.* This account of the subject is metaphysically and universally just. He who does not fear God, will not regard man in any such manner, as reason acknowledges to consist with moral rectitude, and as all men declare to be due from man to man. He may, indeed, like the unjust judge in this parable, for the sake of freeing himself from importunity and trouble, for

the sake of reputation, convenience, gain, or some other selfish object, act with propriety in his external conduct; but he will never possess any real rectitude, and cannot therefore act under its influence.

When Jehoshaphat set judges in the land, he said unto them, *Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord; who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed, and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God; nor respect of persons; nor taking of gifts.* These are obviously the best rules ever given to judicial officers for the direction of their moral conduct; and such judges and such rulers as have accorded with them, have undoubtedly been the best, when prejudice has not operated in a peculiar manner, which the world has ever seen. In all these, the fear of God was the controlling principle. Concerning those rulers, whose conduct is recorded in the Scriptures, the subject does not admit of a doubt: for the divine writers have marked each case so strongly, as to put it wholly out of question. Concerning such men as Moses, Samuel, Josiah, and Nehemiah, no man is at a loss. There is as little uncertainty concerning Alfred the Great, sir Matthew Hale, and many others, in later times. All these, and all other men of a similar character, were supremely controlled in their conduct by the fear of God; the great thing insisted on by Jehoshaphat in these directions.

Nehemiah, particularly, informs us concerning this subject, as it respected himself. *The former governors,* says he, *who have been before me, were chargeable unto the people; and had taken of them bread and wine; besides forty shekels; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people; but so did not I, because of the fear of God.*

Of Hananiah, the ruler of the palace, this eminently worthy man says, chap. vii. 2, that *he gave him charge over Jerusalem, because he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.* Of Cornelius it is said, *he feared God, and gave much alms to the people.* Of Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house, it is declared, that *he feared the Lord greatly; and that he had thus feared him from his youth.* As a proof as well as consequence of this spirit, we are informed, that when *Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, he took a*

hundred and fifty of them, and *hid them in caves; where he kept and fed them* at the daily hazard of his life. By St. Paul, religious reverence is alleged as the ground and directory of Christian submission to lawful authority, Eph. v. 21: and by Malachi, chap. iii. 16, as the cause of Christian fellowship.

Thus we find this spirit extending its benign influence to the various branches of Christian duty; and proving a peculiarly efficacious cause of zeal and exemplariness in all those parts of a religious life, which contribute immediately to the well-being of our fellow-men.

5thly. *Religious reverence is the foundation of peculiar blessings in the present world.*

The secret of the Lord, says the Psalmist, *is with them that fear him.* Psal. xxv. 14. *He hath given meat to them that fear him.* Psal. cxi. 5. *There is no want to them that fear him.* Psal. xxxiv. 9. *By the fear of the Lord are riches and honour.* Prov. xxii. 4. *The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear him.* Psal. xxxiv. 7. *He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him.* Psal. cxlv. 19. These promises and these declarations, furnish complete security to those who fear God, that they shall really *want no good thing:* that their circumstances shall be so ordered, as that *all things shall work together for their good.* They may indeed be troubled, and persecuted, and even cut off by a violent death. But these evils will take place, only when they become necessary; and when they themselves, as well as others, will become more happy, in the end, by means of them, than they could be without them. Ordinarily, they will find, in times both of adversity and prosperity, ways, and those very numerous, in which God will shew himself more attentive to their real good, than they themselves were; and, even in this life, will often see, that the most untoward events, as they seemed while passing, are such as they themselves, while taking a retrospective view, would choose to have had befal them. At the same time, all their enjoyments are *blessings;* and not, like those of the wicked, *enjoyments merely.* At the same time also, while the sufferings of the wicked are punishments and curses, the afflictions of such as fear God are only blessings in disguise.

6thly. *Religious reverence is especially the means of securing eternal life.*

Surely, saith the Psalmist, *his salvation is nigh to them that fear him.* Psal. lxxxv. 9. *I know*, saith Solomon, *it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him. But it shall not be well with the wicked, because he feareth not before God.* Eccles. viii. 12, 13. And again; *The fear of the Lord tendeth to life.* Prov. xix. 23. And again; *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life;* and to sum up all in a single declaration, *The wicked* are declared by Christ, in the character of WISDOM, Prov. i. 29, to be finally given over to destruction, *because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.* But it is unnecessary to spend time any farther in illustrating a doctrine which necessarily follows from the observations made under the preceding heads.

REMARKS.

From these observations Christians are taught,

1st. *The supreme importance of the fear of God.*

This affection is indispensable to the acceptableness of their worship and their obedience; to their hatred of sin; their safety in temptation; and the amendment of their lives. It is a primary ingredient of their piety. It is the well-spring of their benevolence, justice, faithfulness, and brotherly love; of rectitude in them, when rulers; of submission, good order, and public spirit, when subjects. It is indispensable to their enjoyment of the favour of God in this life, and his everlasting kindness in the life to come. Higher motives to the attainment of any character cannot be alleged. Let every Christian, then, cherish and cultivate religious reverence in his own mind. Let him often and habitually bring before his eyes the awful Being, who is the only object of this affection, and whose sole prerogative it is to demand it of his creatures. Let him fasten his views on the presence and greatness, the purity and glory, of Jehovah; and solemnly discern and confess that he himself *is nothing, less than nothing, and vanity.* In the incommunicable splendour, in the incomprehensible majesty, of the uncreated mind, all created glory is lost and forgotten. In the presence of the Sun of righteousness every star hides its diminished head. Before his beams the lustre of angels and archangels fades into nothing. In the presence of his

purity *the heavens* themselves, spotless as they are to a created eye, *are unclean. What then is man, that God should be mindful of him; or the son of man, that he should visit him?* What indeed are we; what indeed must we be; in the presence of such a Being as this?

Such thoughts as these ought ever to be present in the mind. Whenever it turns its views towards the Creator, those views ought, from motives of interest and duty alike, to be invariably of the most reverential kind. They most become the character of God; are eminently pleasing in his sight; constitute the best and happiest frame of mind; and most advantageously influence us in all our duty.

2dly. *From these observations it is clear, that habitual reverence to God is one of the best evidences of piety.*

After what has been said, this truth needs no farther illustration. All that is necessary to add is, that we are bound to examine ourselves accordingly.

3dly. *As reverence to God is the most profitable, so irreverence is the most dangerous habit, which can easily be conceived.*

As I shall have occasion to dwell particularly on this subject, when I come to consider the third command in the decalogue, I shall not dwell upon it here. It is sufficient to observe, at the present time, that every person who is the subject of this character, ought to tremble at the danger to which he is daily exposing himself. There is no manner in which he can more effectually harden his own heart, or provoke the anger of God.

4thly. *He who does not reverence God habitually, is here taught, that he is wholly destitute of religion.*

There is a state of mind, in such persons especially as have been taught to fear God from the morning of life, and have retained a strong influence of these impressions, which it is often difficult to distinguish from evangelical reverence. But there is also a state of mind very extensively existing, which is wholly destitute of this attribute, and which, if examined with an ordinary degree of honesty and candour, may be easily discerned. No infidel, no profane person,

no mere sensualist, or worldling, needs to hesitate, for a moment, in determining that he is destitute of reverence to God, and consequently of religion. Of course, he ought to regard himself as plainly an object of divine wrath; and so far as he has hitherto lived, an acknowledged heir of perdition. *The fear of God is a fountain of life.* Irreverence to him is a well-spring of everlasting death. Let every irreverent man remember therefore, that, to such as he is, *God is a consuming fire.*

I have dwelt more minutely and extensively on this great subject of religion, because of its inherent importance, and because it is, I think, unhappily, a rare topic of discussion from the desk.

SERMON XCIV.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT. HUMILITY.

Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.—1 PET. v. 5.

IN the preceding discourse I considered at some length, that exercise of love to God which is styled *reverence.* I will now proceed to examine the kindred virtue of *humility,* an attribute which seems to differ from reverence, not so much in its nature as in its object. God is the object of reverence; ourselves of humility. The state of the mind in the exercise of these Christian graces seems to be the same. It is hardly possible that he, who is now employed in reverencing his Maker, when casting his eye towards himself, should fail of being deeply humbled by a view of his own circumstances and character.

Before I enter upon this examination, however, it will be proper to observe, that there are other modes in which love to God is exerted; and which, although not demanding a particular discussion here, are yet of high importance, and well deserve to be mentioned. They deserve to be mentioned because of their importance. The reasons why they do not claim a particular discussion are, that more time would be demanded by it, than can well be spared from the examination of such subjects as require a more minute attention; and that they may be sufficiently understood from the observations made on the other exercises of piety.

Among these, the first place is naturally due to *admiration*. By this I mean, *the train of emotions excited in a good mind by the wonderful nature of the various works of God, and the amazing power, and skill, and goodness, which they unfold. God,* saith Eliphaz, Job v. 9, *doth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.* These things we find good men, distinguished in the Scriptures for their piety, observing, and commemorating with a transport of admiration. *O sing unto the Lord,* says David, *for he hath done marvellous things. I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. Surely I will remember thy wonders of old. How great are his signs,* says Nebuchadnezzar, speaking at least the language of a good man, *how mighty are his wonders!* What they felt they called upon others to feel. *Remember,* says David, *his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth.* 1 Chron. xvi. 12. *Declare his glory among the heathen; his wonders among the people.* Ps. xcvi. 3. *Oh give thanks to the Lord of lords, who alone doeth great wonders; for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Admiration is a combined exercise of the mind; and is formed of wonder and complacency. It is an exercise eminently delightful; and is every where presented with objects to awaken it. Both creation and providence are full of wonders, presented to us at every moment, and at every step. Every attribute of God is fitted to excite this emotion by the amazing degree in which it exists; and by the degree also in which it is very often displayed. Thus the Psalmist speaks of the *marvellous loving kindness of God*; St. Peter of his *marvellous light*. King Darius says, He

worketh signs and wonders in heaven and earth. Thus David says, *I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.* Thus one of the names of Christ, whose redemption is the most marvellous of all the works of God, is *wonderful.*

It is to be observed, that *religious admiration* is entirely distinguished from *wonder in the ordinary sense, by its union with complacency.* Ordinary wonder is delightful, but is totally destitute of moral excellence. Religious wonder is still more delightful; and may be excellent in any degree.

Secondly. *Dependance* is also an exercise of the same spirit.

That we are all dependant on God is known to every person possessed of reason; and that we are absolutely dependant on him for every thing, which we enjoy, or which we need. *A willingness to be thus dependant, a complacency in this state of things as appointed by God, accompanied with that humble frame of mind, necessarily attendant upon these affections, constitute what is called religious dependance;* a state of mind, suited exactly to our condition. and eminently useful to our whole Christian character and life.

To these may be added *faith, hope, and joy,* which have already been subjects of discussion; and to these, *submission,* which will be made the theme of a future discourse.

The text contains a command, addressed to all those to whom St. Peter wrote, requiring that they should be clothed with humility; and enforces the precept by this combined reason, that *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.* No precept of revelation has been more disrelished by infidels than this. Hume attacks it in form, and considers the disposition enjoined as both vicious and contemptible. Still it is largely insisted on in the Scriptures, and is required of us unconditionally and indispensably. It is declared to precede all real honour, and thus to be necessary even to its existence. It is pronounced to have been an important attribute in the character of Christ himself. *Learn of me,* says the Saviour of mankind, *for I am meek and lowly of heart.* In the text itself it is plainly asserted to be an

object of divine favour in such a sense, that the grace or free love of God is communicated to those who are humble, and denied to those who are not. In the scriptural scheme therefore, humility is invested with an importance which cannot be measured.

It must indeed be confessed, that nothing is more unaccordant with the native disposition of mankind. Pride, the first sin of our common parents, has characterized all their posterity. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that humility should be disesteemed and calumniated. *If it were of the world, the world would* undoubtedly *love his own; but because* it is *not of the world, therefore the world hateth* it.

Of this attribute of the human mind, as it is exhibited in the Scriptures, I observe,

1st. *It involves in its nature a just sense of our character and condition.*

We were born yesterday of the dust, and to-morrow return to the dust again. In our origin, and in our end, there is certainly little to awaken our pride. In both we are closely allied to the beasts that perish; and may, with the strictest propriety, *say to corruption, Thou art our father; and to the worm, Thou art our mother and our sister.* How strange is it that a being should be proud, who is going to the grave; who in a few days will lie down in the dust, to become a feast of worms, and to be changed into a mass of earth! Such however will speedily be the lot of the haughtiest monarch, the most renowned hero, and the proudest philosopher, who now says in his heart, *I will ascend up to heaven, I will be like the Most High.*

During this little period, we are *dependant* creatures. Nothing is more coveted, nothing more eagerly sought, nothing boasted of with more complacency by the children of pride, than independence. But the boast is groundless, and the opinion which gives birth to it false. "*What hast thou,* says St. Paul, *which thou hast not received?* From God we derive life, and breath, and all things. All of them are mere gifts of his bounty; and to the least of them we cannot make a single claim. To his sovereign pleasure also are we every moment indebted for their continuance.

That which he gives, we gather. He opens his hand, and we are filled with good. He takes away our breath; we die and return to dust.

But we are not dependant on God only. To a vast extent we are necessarily indebted, for a great body of our enjoyments, to our fellow-men. We can have neither food nor raiment; we can neither walk nor ride; we can have neither sleep nor medicine; we can neither enjoy ourselves, nor be useful to others, without the aid of multitudes of our fellow-men. Especially is the proud man thus dependant. Life to him is only a scene of suffering, unless he is continually regaled by the real or imagined respect of those around him. Homage is the food on which he lives; and applause the atmosphere in which alone he is able to breathe.

Among those on whom we are thus dependant, sometimes for life itself, and always for its comforts, are to be regularly numbered the poor, whom we are so prone to despise; nay, the slaves whom we regard as having been created merely as instruments of our pleasure. To what a lowly condition is a haughty man thus reduced, and how different his actual situation from that which his conversation and demeanour would induce us to imagine!

Nor is our situation less *precarious* than it is dependant. The possessions, the comforts, the hopes, which we enjoy to-day, may all to-morrow vanish for ever. Our riches may make to themselves wings as an eagle, and fly away towards heaven. Our health may be wrested from us by disease, and our comfort by pain. We may become decrepit, deaf, or blind. Our friends and families may bid us the last adieu, and retire to the world of spirits. Nay, ourselves and our pride may be buried together in the grave. What foundation does such a state of existence furnish on which to build our pride?

We are also *ignorant*. Much indeed is said of our learning and science. It would be well if more could be be said, and said with truth, concerning our wisdom. With all our boasts, how little do we know! How many objects are presented to us every day, of which we know nothing except their existence! How many questions do even little children ask, which no philosopher is able to an-

swer! How many subjects of investigation say to every inquirer, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther!"

Every thing which we know brings up to our view the many more which we cannot know; and thus daily forces upon us, if we will open our eyes, irresistible conviction of the narrowness of those limits by which our utmost researches are bounded of the infantile nature of our actual attainments, of the smallness of those which are possible.

Among the subjects which display this ignorance in the strongest degree, those of a moral nature, those which immediately concern our duty and salvation, infinitely more important to us than any others, hold the primary place. What man is able to find out of himself concerning these, we know by what he has actually found out. Cast your eyes over this great globe, and over the past ages of time, and mark the nature of the religious systems invented by man. How childish, how senseless, how self-contradictory, have been the opinions; how infatuated, how sottish, the precepts by which they have professedly regulated the moral conduct of men; how debased, how full of turpitude, how fraught with frenzy, the religious services by which they have laboured to propitiate their gods, and obtain a future happy existence; nay, what mere creatures of Bedlam were the gods themselves, and their delirious worshippers!

But for the Scriptures we should now have the same views which have been spread over the whole Heathen world; and might this day have been prostrating ourselves before stocks and stones, and looking to drunkenness, prostitution, and the butchery of human victims, as the means of obtaining a happy immortality. How inexpressibly deplorable is this ignorance! How humble the character of those of whom it can be truly predicated!

For our exception from all these errors, we are indebted solely to the Bible. But with this invaluable book in our hands we reluctantly admit, in many cases, even its fundamental truths: truths of supreme importance to the establishment of virtue in our minds, and to the acquisition of eternal life beyond the grave: truths which are the glory of the revealed system, and which have been the means of conducting to heaven a multitude which no man can num-

ber. In the place of these what absurdities have not been imbibed! absurdities immeasurably disgraceful to the understanding, and absolutely ruinous to the soul. How long these absurdities have reigned! How widely they have spread! What innumerable mischiefs they have done! How strongly they discover a violent tendency in our nature to reject truth and welcome error! Who with this picture before him can doubt, that on this account we have abundant reason for humility?

In addition to these things we are *sinful creatures. The heart,* says the prophet Jeremiah, *is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* He who reads the three first chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, or peruses the history of mankind, or attentively considers the conduct of himself and his fellow-men, will without much hesitation adopt the decision of the prophet. It is wonderful that sinful beings should be proud of their character; and remarkable that pride is indulged by no other beings. Of what shall we be proud? In our conversation and in our writings we charge each other endlessly with impiety, profaneness, perjury, irreligion, injustice, fraud, falsehood, slander, oppression, cruelty, theft, lewdness, sloth, gluttony, and drunkenness. The charges are either true or false. If they are false, they are in themselves abominable wickedness. If they are true, those on whom they rest are abominably wicked. What an unhappy foundation is here furnished for pride!

If we look into our own hearts and into our own lives, and perform this duty faithfully, we shall find ample reason for self-condemnation; we shall see that our own hearts at least answer to the declaration of Jeremiah; we shall see ourselves alienated from God, revolted from his government, opposed to his law, ungrateful for his blessings, distrustful of his sincerity, and discontented with his administrations. With all these sins before us, we shall find ourselves slow of heart to believe or repent.

God has provided for us and proffered to us, deliverance from our sins, and from the punishment which they have merited. He has sent a Saviour into the world to redeem us from under the curse of the law, and that by the effusion of his own blood; but we reject him. He has sent his Spi-

rit to sanctify us and to make us his children; but we resist his influence. He has offered to be reconciled to us; but we refuse to be reconciled to him. We might be virtuous, we might be happy; but we will not. What causes for humiliation are here presented to our view!

Finally. We are *miserable* creatures. In the present world we are to a great extent unhappy. Cold and heat, hunger and thirst, anxiety, disappointment, toil, poverty, loss of friends, disgrace, sorrow, pain, disease, and death, divide among them a great part of our days, and leave us scarcely more than a few transient gleams of ease, comfort, and hope. How often are most of these evils doubled and tripled by similar sufferings of such as are dear to us in the bonds of nature and affection! How truly does Job declare, that *man who is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble.*

From these calamities our only way of escape conducts us to the grave. Beyond that dreary mansion stands the last tribunal, at which our eternal doom will be irreversibly fixed. But the only reward of sin is perdition, perdition final and irremediable. This is the deplorable end of the sins and miseries, which so extensively constitute our character and our allotments in the present world.

Look now at the description which has been given, and tell me for which of these things we shall be proud. Is it our origin, our dependance, the precariousness of our life and its enjoyments, our ignorance, our errors, our sins, or our miseries?

In the mean time let it be remembered, that this very pride is one of our grossest sins; whether it be pride of birth, of wealth, of beauty, of talents, of accomplishments, of exploits, of place, of power, or of moral character. *A proud look*, from whatsoever source derived, *is an abomination to the Lord.* Angels by their pride lost heaven. Our first parents by their pride ruined the world.

That the view which has been here given of the state and character of man is just, will not, because it cannot be, questioned. Conformed to it are all the views entertained of the same subjects by every man possessing the humility of the gospel. On these very considerations, especially as applied to himself, is his humility found.

2dly. *Humility involves a train of affections accordant with such a sense of our character and conditions.*

It involves that candour and equity which dispose us to receive and acknowledge truth, however humbling to our pride or painful to our fears, in preference to error, however soothing or flattering. The humble man feels assured also, that it is his true interest to know and feel the worst of his situation; that a just sense of his condition may be the means of rendering it more hopeful and more desirable; that false conceptions of it, on the contrary, cannot possibly do him any good, and will, in all probability, do him much harm; that truth is a highway, which may conduct him to heaven; but that error is a labyrinth, in which he may be lost for ever.

Equally disposed is he to do justice to the several subjects of his contemplation. Cheerfully is he ready to feel and to acknowledge, that he is just such a being as he actually is; that he is no wiser, no better, no more honourable, and no more safe; but just as lowly, as dependant, as ignorant, as guilty, and as much in danger, as truth pronounces him to be. With the humiliation, dependance, and precariousness, of his circumstances he is satisfied, because they are ordained by his Maker. His guilt he acknowledges to be real; and at the sight of it willingly takes his place in the dust. His sufferings he confesses to be merited, and therefore bows submissively beneath the rod. Claims he makes none, for he feels that there is nothing in himself to warrant them; and although he wishes ardently to escape from his sin and misery, he never thinks of demanding it as a right; but so far as he is permitted, humbly hopes it as a gift of free grace, as a mere blessing derived from the overflowing mercy of his Creator.

Among the subjects which his situation forces upon his mind, the means of expiating his guilt become one of primary importance. After surveying it on every side, he pronounces the attempt hopeless; and sees, with full conviction, that if God should mark iniquity it would be impossible for him to stand. In this melancholy situation he does not, like the man of the world, rise up in haughty rebellion against God; he does not say, *Who is the Almighty, that I should serve him; and what profit shall I have, if I*

pray unto him? He does not insolently exclaim, *Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?* On the contrary, in the language of Job he modestly cries out, *Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* With Daniel he sets his face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fastings and sackcloth and ashes; and he prays unto the Lord his God, and makes his confession, and says, *O Lord, the great and dreadful God! keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love thee, I have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments.*

But although in himself he sees no means of deliverance or escape, he finds in the Scriptures of truth ample provision made for both. The provision is complete. An expiation is there made for the sins of men; and a deliverance from the miseries to which they were destined effectuated, which involve all that the most sanguine mind can wish concerning both. Still the scheme involves an absolute humiliation of human pride; for it represents man as totally destitute of any thing in his native character or in his efforts which can recommend him to God, or which can be regarded by the final Judge as any ground of his justification. It is a scheme of mere mercy; and every one who is to receive the blessings of it, must come in the character of a penitent supplicating for pardon through the righteousness of a Redeemer.

Nothing can be more painful to pride than this scheme of deliverance; but nothing can be more welcome to the heart of genuine humility. God, in the great work of forgiving, redeeming, and sanctifying man, appears to the humble penitential mind invested with peculiar glory, excellence, and loveliness. *God*, says St. Paul, *who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* In the work of redemption accomplished by this divine person, the character of God is seen by the sanctified mind in a light entirely new, and more honourable to him than that which is presented by any other work, either of creation or providence. His

benevolence shines here in the exercise of mercy towards the apostate children of men in a manner which is new and singular, a manner in which it has been displayed to the inhabitants of no other part of the universe. Here especially it is discerned that God is love; and the humble penitent is so deeply affected with the kindness manifested in expiating and forgiving sin and renewing the soul, that he is ready to exclaim with the Psalmist, *Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but to thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake.* In the midst of his astonishment that such mercy should be extended to him, a poor, guilty, miserable wretch, unworthy in his own view of the least of all mercies, the pride even of self-righteousness is for a while at least laid asleep; and his thoughts and affections, instead of being turned towards himself, are absorbed in the condescension and goodness of his Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

It is impossible for the man in whom this attribute is found, not to turn his thoughts from time to time to the perfect purity of God. No subject of contemplation can more strongly impress upon the mind a sense of its own impurity. In his sight the heavens themselves are not clean, and the angels before him are charged with folly. How much more abominable and filthy to the eye of the penitent must man appear, who drinketh iniquity like water? In the sight of this awful and most affecting object, he will almost necessarily exclaim with Job, *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee! Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

When such a man contemplates the character of his Christian brethren, emotions of the same general nature will necessarily occupy his mind. St. Paul has directed Christians to *forbear one another in all lowliness and meekness of mind, and to esteem others better than themselves.* This precept, which to a man of the world appears absurd and incapable of being obeyed, involves no difficulty in the eye of him who is evangelically humble. The sins of other Christians are of course imperfectly known to him. Their sins of thought are all hidden from his eyes: their sins of

action he rarely witnesses; and of those which are perpetrated in his presence, he cannot know either the extent or malignity. His own sins, in the mean time, both of heart and of life, are in a sense always naked before him; and he can hardly fail to discern, in some good degree, their number, their aggravations, and their guilt. Hence other Christians will, in a comparative sense, appear to him to be clean, while himself will seem unsound and polluted from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. In this situation, the difficulty of esteeming others better than himself vanishes. Impossible as it would be for a proud man to think in this manner; the only difficulty to the humble man is to think in any other.

Such at all times, with the exceptions for which the human character always lays the foundation, will be the emotions naturally imbibed and strongly cherished by Christian humility. But there are certain seasons in which they will be excited in a peculiar degree. Such will be the case in the house of God. Here he is brought immediately into the presence of his Maker; here he appears in the character of a sinner and of a suppliant for mercy; here he draws nigh to his Maker in the solemn ordinances of the sanctuary; here the character and sufferings of the Redeemer are set before him in the light of heaven; here he witnesses all the wonders of redeeming, forgiving, and sanctifying love. What God is, and what he himself is, what he has done to destroy himself, and what God has done to save him from destruction, are here presented to his eye, and brought home to his heart in the most affecting manner. In this solemn place, also, he is in the midst of his fellow-Christians, uniting with them in their prayers and praises, and sitting with them at the table of Christ to celebrate his sufferings, and the love wherewith he loved us and gave himself for us. In such a situation, how great and good must his Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, appear! How little, how unworthy, how sinful, himself! How strange must it seem, that he, who is unworthy of the least, should thus be put into the possession of the greatest of all mercies! How naturally, how often, and how anxiously, will he inquire, whether it can be proper for such a being as him-

self to unite with the followers of the Redeemer in their worship, share in their privileges, and participate in their hopes and in their joys!

Feelings of the same general nature will also be awakened, and often in an equal degree, when he retires to his closet to pray to his Father who is in secret. Here he withdraws entirely from the world, and meets his Maker face to face. The divine character and his own must be brought before his eyes in the strongest light, while he is employed in confessing his sins, and supplicating pardon and sanctification; gratefully acknowledging the blessings which he has received, and humbly asking for those which he needs. How naturally would he exclaim, *Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou shouldest visit him!*

Such, if I mistake not, are the views formed by Christian humility; and such the affections of the mind in which it prevails.

REMARKS.

From these observations it is evident,

1st. *That evangelical humility is exactly conformed to the real circumstances and character of men.*

The views which the humble man entertains of himself and of his condition are exactly suited to both. He is just such a being as he supposes himself to be, and in just such a condition. His origin is as lowly, his situation as dependant and precarious, his mind as ignorant and erring, his character as guilty, and his destination fraught with as much distress and danger, as he himself realizes. His views therefore are absolutely true and just. If such views then are honourable to a rational being, if no other thoughts can be honourable to such a being, then the views entertained by humility are honourable to the human character. On the contrary, the views of pride, or, as Mr. Hume chooses to style it, *self-valuation*, are absolutely unsuited both to the condition and character of man. They are radically and universally unjust and false, and of course are only disgraceful and contemptible.

The affections which have been here considered as in-

volved in humility, are evidently no less just. They spring irresistibly from the views: and no sober mind can entertain the latter without experiencing the former. These affections are all plainly the harmony of the heart with the dictates of the understanding; dictates seen and acknowledged to be just and certain, and where the heart is governed by candour, irresistible. Whenever the mind sees itself to be thus ignorant, erring, and sinful, and its situation thus dependant, precarious, and distressing; it cannot, without violence done to itself, fail of feeling both the character and condition, and of feeling them deeply; for they are objects of immeasurable importance to its whole well-being. Equally just are the affections which he exercises towards his Maker and his fellow-Christians. The difference between the character of God and his own character being seen to be such; so entire, so vast, particularly as he is infinitely holy and pure, while himself is altogether polluted with guilt; no emotions can be proper towards this great and glorious Being, which do not involve a strong sense of this amazing moral difference between him and itself. In such a case, where there is no humility, there can be no reverence towards God; and where there is no reverence, it is impossible that there should be any thing acceptable towards him.

In the same manner humility enters into every other affection of a sanctified mind towards its Maker. Our views of the mercy of God exercised towards us, and the emotions excited by them, are exactly proportioned to the apprehensions which we form of our own unworthiness. He to whom much is forgiven, our Saviour informs us, will love much. Pardon, mercy, and grace, are terms which mean little, if they have any meaning that is realized, in the eye of him who is not humbled for his sins, and who does not feel his own absolute need of pardon. The song of the redeemed is sung only by those who realize the love of Christ, because he has washed them from their sins in his own blood. The gratitude, therefore, exercised to God for his unspeakable mercy, in forgiving our sins, and redeeming us from under the curse of the law, will in a great measure be created by our humility.

In the same manner does it enhance our complacency in

the divine character. Of dependance it is the essence; of adoration, and indeed of all our worship, it is the substance and the soul.

2dly. *From these observations it is evident, that no man can hope for acceptance with God without humility.*

God, says the text, *resisteth the proud, but giveth grace* (or favour) *to the humble.* The proud and the humble are two great classes, including the whole of the human race. Of which class does it seem probable to the eye of sober reason, that the infinitely perfect Author of all things will select his own family, and the objects of his everlasting love. Those who possess the views and the spirit here described; or those who indulge the "self-valuation" so grateful to Mr. Hume: those who boldly come before him with, *God I thank thee that I am not as other men;* or those who *dare not lift up their eyes to heaven, but, smiting upon their breasts, say, God be merciful to me a sinner!* How obvious is it to common sense, that if he accept any of our race, they will be such as have just views of their character and condition, of their own absolute unworthiness, of the greatness of his mercy in forgiving their sins and sanctifying their souls, of the transcendent glory of the Redeemer in becoming their propitiation, and of the infinite benignity of the divine Spirit in renewing them in the image, and restoring them to the favour, of God. Who else can possess the spirit, who else can unite in the employments, who else can harmonize in the praises, of the first-born?

Let me ask, is it possible that a proud man should be a candidate for immortal life; whether proud of his birth, his wealth, his station, his accomplishments, or his moral character? suppose him to arrive in the regions of life, in what manner would his pride be employed? Which of these subjects would he make the theme of his conversation with the spirits of just men made perfect? How would he blend his pride with their worship; how would he present it before the throne of God?

3dly. *From these observations also we learn, that humility is a disposition eminently lovely.*

Learn of me, says the Saviour of mankind, to proud and

perishing sinners, *for I am meek and lowly of heart.* How astonishing a declaration from the mouth of him who controlled the elements with a word, at whose command the dead were raised to life, and at whose rebuke demons trembled and fled! Draw nigh, ye miserable worms of the dust, place yourselves by the side of this glorious person, and recite before him the foundations on which your loftiness rests; your riches, your rank, your talents, and your stations. How will these subjects appear to his eye! How will those appear, who make them the grounds of their *self-valuation?* Meekness and lowliness of heart adorned him with beauty inexpressible. Can pride be an ornament to you?

Would you be amiable in the sight of God, you must essentially resemble him who was "altogether lovely." Even you yourselves cannot but discern, that, had he been proud, it would have tarnished his character, and have eclipsed the face of the Sun of righteousness.

In the mean time let Christians remember and feel, that they themselves will be lovely, exactly in proportion as they approximate to the character of the Redeemer in their humility. *The same mind,* says St. Paul to the Philippians, *be in you which was also in Christ; who, being in the form of God thought it no robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* From what a height did he descend! How lowly the visible station which he assumed!

Your humility towards God will make you lovely in his sight; your humility towards your fellow-Christians will make you lovely in theirs. In both cases, it will be a combination of views and affections conformed to truth, exactly suited to your character and circumstances, and equally conformed to the good pleasure of God, and to the perfect example of his beloved Son. It will mingle with all your affections, and make them sweet and delightful. It will operate on all your conduct, and make it amiable in the sight of every beholder. From pride and all its wretched consequences, it will deliver you. Of the grace of God it will

assure you. *For to this man will I look, says the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, even to him, who is of an humble and a contrite spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.* It will accompany you through life, and lessen all the troubles, and increase all the comforts, of your pilgrimage. It will soften your dying bed, and enhance your hope and your confidence before the last tribunal.

SERMON XCV.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT. RESIGNATION.

And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.—LUKE XXII. 41, 42.

THE next exercise of love to God in our progress is resignation.

Of this excellence the text contains the most perfect example which has been recorded or witnessed in the universe. Our Saviour, while in the garden of Gethsemane, having withdrawn from *his disciples about a stone's cast, kneeled down and prayed,* under an agonizing sense of the evils which he was about to suffer. His prayer in the midst of this agony was, *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done!* The situation of Christ was much more trying than we can conceive. Yet in this situation he bows his will entirely to the will of God; and prays him to remove the cup, only on the condition that he is willing: and that not his own will, but the will of the Father, may be done. The occasion was wonderful; the resignation was complete. He yielded himself entirely into the hands of his Father; and earnestly

desired, that his will, whatever it should cost himself, might be done. Nothing can be more edifying than this example; nor can any thing be more instructive. By it we are taught,

1st. *That religious resignation is a quiet yielding of ourselves to the disposal of God, and not to the mere sufferance of evil.*

CHRIST *prayed* earnestly and repeatedly, that, if it were possible, the evil, or *the cup, might pass from him.* That this was perfect rectitude on his part will not be questioned. What he, with perfect rectitude, desired to escape, we may, with entire rectitude also, desire to escape. As *he was not willing* to suffer evil; it *was perfectly right, that he should not be willing.* It is entirely right therefore, that we should be equally unwilling.

But Christ was entirely willing to do and to suffer, whatever God willed him to do or to suffer. He was however disposed thus to do and suffer, merely because it was the will of God; and because that will requires nothing but what is perfectly wise and good, and perfectly desirable. As therefore the perfect resignation of our Saviour was a yielding of himself to the will of God, and not at all to mere suffering; so it is clear, beyond a debate, that religious resignation is, in every case, *of this nature only.*

2dly. *That it is our duty to resign ourselves to the will of God entirely; and that in all situations of life.*

The situation in which Christ expressed the resignation in the text, was certainly much more trying than any which men experience in the present world. At the same time he had not merited this distress by any fault or defect of his own. His pure and perfect mind was free alike from error and from sin. Accordingly, in that memorable prayer contained in the seventeenth chapter of John, and uttered just before his agony in the garden, he could say with perfect confidence, as well as with exact truth and propriety, *I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father! glorify thou me, with thine ownself, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.* Yet in this situation of peculiar distress, he gave up, entirely, every wish of his own; choosing rather to suffer these wonderful afflictions, if it

were the will of God that he should suffer them, than to escape them if it were not. Whatever afflictions befal us, we are ever to remember, that we have deserved them; and that they are always inferior in intenseness to those which were suffered by Christ. Our reasons for resigning ourselves entirely to the disposal of God therefore, are, in some respects, greater than his. In all situations, it of course becomes us to *be still, and know, that he who afflicts us is God.*

To render our resignation entire, it is indispensable that it should be unmingled with murmuring, impatience, distrust of the goodness of God, or any dissatisfaction with his providence. We may lawfully wish, not to suffer evil, considered by itself; but we cannot lawfully wish, that the will of God should not be done. Nor can we lawfully complain at any time of that which is done by his will. He who complains, has not, if he is resigned at all, arrived at the due degree of resignation. Jeremiah, with irresistible force, asks, *Shall a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sins?*

3dly. *Religious resignation is perfectly consistent with the clearest and strongest sense of the evils which we suffer; and with the deepest distress while we suffer.*

Christ, as I have observed, was perfectly resigned. Yet Christ felt, in the deepest manner, the whole extent of the evils which he suffered. This we know, both because he prayed to be delivered from them, if it were possible; and because his agonies forced the sweat to descend upon him *in the form of great drops of blood.* What Christ did, in this respect, it is lawful for us to do. Christ felt these evils to their full extent; and yet was perfectly resigned. We therefore may in the same manner feel the evils which we experience; and yet be the subjects, in this very conduct, of true evangelical resignation.

4thly. *Christian resignation is perfectly consistent with the most fervent supplications to God for deliverance from the evils which we suffer.*

The evidence of this is complete in the example of Christ. Christ thus prayed while yet he was perfectly resigned; we of course may thus pray, without lessening at all the degree, or affecting the genuineness, of our resignation.

The obligations which we are under to exercise this spirit, are found both in the command of God, and the nature of things. The command of God carries with it, in all cases, an authority and obligation which are without limits. With this authority he requires us to be resigned to his whole will; asserting it, with the most perfect propriety, to be *his prerogative* alone to prescribe, and *our duty* entirely to obey. We are his creatures; and are therefore under all possible obligation to do his pleasure. At the same time, his will is perfectly right; and ought exactly to be obeyed, even if there were no authority to bind, and no reward to retribute our obedience. Our own supreme good is entirely promoted, by our obedience only; both as the obedience itself is delightful, and as it is followed by a glorious and divine reward.

Resignation is not merely a single act, but a general course of obedience; a general preparation of the heart to yield itself to God's known will, and his promised dispensations. I here include, and have all along included, what is commonly called *submission*. Submission differs from resignation in nothing but this: *Submission is yielding the heart to the divine will, in that which has already taken place, or is now taking place;* and resignation, yielding the heart to that which it is foreseen, may or will hereafter take place. The spirit is exactly the same, as to its nature, in all instances; and the difference is found only in its regarding the past, present, or future, accomplishment of the divine will. This distinction is so nearly a nominal one only, that both names are used indiscriminately; and of so little importance, as to preclude any necessary regard to it in this discourse.

This disposition is the only becoming temper in suffering creatures, so far as their sufferings are concerned. The sufferings of mankind, in the present world, are all expressions of the will of God. There are but three dispositions with which they can be regarded; *impatience, indifference*, or *acquiescence*. It cannot be necessary for me to shew, that the last of these is the only spirit with which we can receive either profitably or becomingly the chastisements inflicted by the hand of God.

To acquiesce in the divine pleasure under sufferings, is a

strong and eminently excellent exercise of love and reverence to God. It is not easy to conceive how we can give a higher or more decisive testimony of our delight in the divine character, or our approbation of the divine government, than by quietly yielding to that government in circumstances of suffering and sorrow; by testifying with the heart, that we have such a sense of the wisdom and goodness of God, as to be satisfied to undergo whatever afflictions he is pleased to send upon us; and to give up our own wishes and comforts, that the pleasure of God may be done and his glory promoted. This is an exercise of love to our Maker which proves itself to be genuine and excellent, by the willing self-denial which it encounters, and by the victory which it gains over interest and pleasure powerfully present.

It is also to be remembered, that the Christian, notwithstanding he is a Christian, is still a sinful being. Afflictions are punishments of his sins incomparably less than he has deserved. Resignation to them is a candid, equitable, dutiful, acknowledgment of the justice of God in sending them, and an humble confession of the sins by which they have been deserved.

By this spirit the general selfishness of the mind is gradually wasted away; the strength of passion and appetite continually weakened; its impiety prevented; its ingratitude destroyed; and its rebellion broken down. The rebel is converted into a child. A serenity and quietness of disposition take possession of the soul; allay the bitterness of its distresses: soothe all its tumults into peace; mingle comfort in the cup of sorrow; and happily blend with all its sufferings the inherent delight of resignation; a supporting sense of the approbation and favour of God.

REMARKS.

From this passage of Scripture, thus considered, it is evident,

1st. *That willingness to suffer perdition is no part of Christian resignation.*

It is well known to my audience, that the contrary doctrine to that which I have here asserted, has been taught by men of distinguished reputation for learning and piety: and

it is equally well known, that no human learning and piety will furnish a sufficient security from error. All human opinions therefore may be warrantably questioned, and none are to be received, without evidence, upon the mere reputation of their authors. While therefore I would treat the authors with becoming respect, I shall take the liberty freely to question their opinions.

That Christian resignation does not at all involve a willingness to suffer perdition, is, in my view, unanswerably clear from the text. To the arguments derived from this source, I shall however add a few out of many suggested by the nature of the subject.

In the first place, *Christian resignation is resignation to nothing but the will of God.* This position has, if I mistake not, been proved beyond debate in the body of the discourse. *The will of God, by which we are to be governed, is plainly that which is or can be known to us.* The proof of this, both from reason and Scripture, is complete. Reason teaches us, or rather we know by intuition, that it is impossible for us to be governed by a rule which we cannot know. Revelation informs us, that *secret things belong to God; and that only the things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever; that we may do all the words of his law.* That then which is not known to us, cannot belong to us in any sense as a rule or part of our duty.

But it is not known, and without a new and direct revelation it cannot be known, to any man living, to be the will of God, that he should suffer perdition. The Scriptures reveal to us, that the impenitent and unbelieving will indeed suffer this terrible punishment. But they do not reveal to any man, that he himself will be impenitent and unbelieving when he leaves the world, or that he will finally be condemned. It is impossible therefore for any man to know, in this world, that the will of God will require him to suffer perdition. If then he resigns himself to this dreadful allotment, as being a part of the will of God; he himself presumptuously establishes, by his own contrivance and conjecture, something as the will of God which God has not declared to be such; which the man himself cannot know to be such, while in the present world; and which he cannot lawfully presume to be such. Instead therefore of

resigning himself to the divine will, he resigns himself to a will which his own imagination creates for God, and is guilty of intruding into the province, and assuming the prerogatives, of his Creator.

(2dly.) *Every sincere professor of religion, either knows or believes himself to be a Christian.*

If he *knows* himself to be a Christian, then he *knows* it to be contrary to the will of God, that he should be finally condemned, or that he should suffer the miseries of perdition. To be willing, *in this case*, to suffer these miseries, is to be willing to suffer that which is known by him to be contrary to the will of God. It is a consent to prevent Christ of one trophy of his cross, one glorious fruit of his sufferings, and to take a gem from his crown of glory.

If the professor *believes* himself to be a Christian; then, in being willing to suffer perdition, he is willing to suffer in direct contradiction to what he *believes* to be the will of God. His belief here ought to have exactly the same influence on his disposition and conduct, as his knowledge in the former case. Wherever we have not, and at the time when we are to act cannot have, *certainty*, we are under absolute obligation to be governed by *the highest probability*. In this case, therefore, the duty of the professor is exactly the same as in the former.

When we remember, that the sufferer becomes of course the eternal enemy of God and of all good; and that the professor, in thus consenting to suffer, consents in the same act to be the eternal enemy of God and of all good; and when this consent is yielded in direct contradiction to what he either knows or believes to be the will of God; it will, I think, be difficult to find a reason which will evince this conduct to be a part of the Christian's duty.

(3dly.) *There is no precept in the Scriptures enjoining this conduct.*

It certainly must seem strange, that a duty so extraordinary, and so fitted to perplex the minds of mere men, should, if it be really a duty, be no where expressly enjoined. Certainly it is not likely to be easily embraced by any man. It can hardly be supposed, therefore, if it be really a part of the evangelical system, to be left to inference, philosophy,

and supposition. No precept, so far as we are able to judge, needs more to be clear and express, than that which should require of us this singular mental effort. But such a precept cannot be found.

(4thly.) *There is no example of such resignation recorded in the Scriptures.*

There are two examples which are alleged in support of the resignation in question. The first is in Exod. xxxii. 31, 32. *And Moses returned unto the Lord; and said, Oh! this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin: and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.* The part of this text which is alleged in support of the doctrine here contended against, is contained in these expressions: *Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin: if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.* It is supposed, that Moses prayed to God to make him miserable, on the condition specified, throughout eternity.

Concerning this subject I observe, first, that the expression, *blot me out of thy book which thou hast written,* is wholly figurative; and like most other figurative language, is capable of being understood in various senses. To say the most, then, it is ambiguous and uncertain. I need not say, that such a doctrine as this ought not to be founded on an ambiguous passage of Scripture, nor on any uncertainty whatever.

Secondly; It will be admitted that Moses, although he prayed in a violent state of emotion, yet spoke in some accordance with common sense. But the interpretation given to his words by those who teach this doctrine, makes him speak the most arrant nonsense. His words are, *Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin: and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.* Here, according to the abettors of this doctrine, Moses prays, that God would forgive their sin, if he was willing; and, if he was unwilling, that he would blot him out of the book of [illegible]. They say, that the benevolence of Moses was so great, that he chose rather to suffer endless misery, in order to obtain the forgiveness of his countrymen, than to be endlessly happy, and see them condemned. But they do not attend to the words of Moses. He himself says no such thing. On the

contrary, he prays, that God would blot him out of his book, if he will *not* forgive their sin: choosing not to be happy himself, unless they may be happy with him; and choosing to be endlessly miserable, rather than to be endlessly happy, unless they may be happy also. This, it must be acknowledged, if it be benevolence, is benevolence of a very extraordinary kind. Moses, according to this scheme, is desirous, if he cannot obtain all the good which he wishes, to have none: and if his countrymen cannot be happy, to be miserable himself, to be endlessly miserable, without the least expectation of doing, without a possibility of doing, any good whatever to them: in plain language, to be endlessly miserable for the sake of being endlessly miserable.

It is also resignation of an extraordinary kind. Instead of being resignation to the will of God, it is resignation directly opposed, and perfectly known by Moses himself to be directly opposed, to that will. Moses certainly knew, that he was destined to endless life; and therefore certainly knew, that this was the will of God. To this will, thus known, his prayer, interpreted according to this scheme, is directly contradictory. I hesitate not to say, that Moses never exercised resignation of this nature.

Thirdly; *The real meaning of this prayer is, that, on the condition specified, God would take away his life.*

After the rebellion of the Israelites at the foot of the mount in which they made and worshipped the golden calf, God directed Moses to *let him alone that he might consume them;* and promised to *make of Moses* himself *a great nation.* Alluring as this promise was, Moses loved Israel too well to forsake them on this occasion. He therefore besought God to forgive them, with great earnestness and anxiety; and prayed fervently also, that, if he would not forgive them, he would take away his own life; probably, that he might not witness the melancholy sight of the ruin of a people, for whom he had done and suffered so much, and in whose interests his heart was so entirely bound up. The book here called *the book which God had written*, is a figurative allusion to *a register, in which were recorded the names of living persons;* and, in the present case, is considered as a register written by God, in which were enrolled the names of all living men. To blot out the name,

is equivalent to taking away the life of any person thus registered. That this was what was intended by Moses must, I think, be unanswerably evident, from the observations which have been already made.

A similar prayer of the same illustrious man is recorded in Numb. xi. 14, 15. *I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.* The only difference between the two cases seems to be, that in the former case, Moses prayed that he might not live to see the ruin of his people; and in the latter, requested to be released from life, because he was unable to bear the burden of superintending and providing for them.

The other passage is Rom. ix. 1—3. *I say the truth in Christ; I lie not; my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost; that I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.* Here it is supposed, that St. Paul declares himself desirous, or at least capable of being desirous, to suffer final perdition for the sake of rescuing his brethren, the Israelites, from their ruinous condition. But I apprehend the apostle says no such thing. For,

In the first place, *the declaration in the Greek* is not, *I could wish*, but *I wished: not* ηυχοιμην, *in the optative mode, but* ηυχομην, *in the indicative.* The apostle therefore here declares a fact which had taken place; not the state of his mind at the time present; nor a fact which might take place at that or any future time. I do not deny, that the indicative is sometimes used for the *optative*, or, as it ought to be here understood, in the *potential* sense; to denote *what could be done*, instead of *what has been done*. But no case of this kind is to be presumed: nor is such a meaning to be admitted, unless the general construction of a passage renders the admission necessary.

Secondly. *The admission of it here ruins the meaning of the passage altogether.* It is introduced in this manner. *I say the truth in Christ; I lie not; my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.* Now what is the assertion, to gain credit to which, these three declarations, two

of them attended with all the solemnity of an oath, were made? It is found in the following verse. *I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow of heart.* Can it be imagined that St. Paul would think it necessary or proper to preface this assertion in so solemn a manner? Was it a matter even of surprise, that a person, afflicted and persecuted as he was, should be the subject of such sorrow? Could the apostle need the aid of a triple declaration and a double oath, to make this assertion believed? And if these were not necessary, can he be supposed to have used them for such a purpose; or for any purpose whatever?

As this cannot have been the apostle's meaning of this passage; so, happily, that meaning is sufficiently obvious. St. Paul, it is well known, was considered by the Jews as their bitter enemy; as hating their temple, worship, and nation; and as conspiring with the Gentiles to subvert all those which they esteemed their best interests. This prejudice of theirs against him was an immense evil; for it not only obstructed powerfully, and often fatally, the success of his evangelical labours among the Gentiles; but in almost all instances prevented the Jews from receiving the gospel. This evil the apostle felt in its full force; as he teaches us on many occasions, by endeavouring earnestly to clear himself of the imputation. The present is one of those instances: and the meaning of the passage is rendered perfectly clear and highly important, when it is considered in this manner; and the propriety of the solemn preface with which it commences fully evinced. The words rendered, *For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ*, ought to be included, as they plainly were intended to be, in a parenthesis. The passage, truly translated in this manner, will run thus. *I say the truth in Christ; I lie not; my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost: that I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart (for I also wished myself separated from Christ), for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh.* That the apostle had really this sorrow and heaviness for his nation, he knew would be doubted by some, and disbelieved by others. He therefore naturally and properly appeals to God for the reality of his love to them, and for the truth of the declaration in which it is asserted. To shew

his sympathy with them in their ruined state, he reminds them, that he was once the subject of the same violent unbelief and alienation from Christ; and, that then he earnestly chose to be what he here calls *anathema*, justly rendered in the margin *separated*, from Christ, just as *they* now chose it. A person once in this condition, would naturally be believed to feel deeply the concerns of such as were now in the same condition; and would therefore allege this consideration with the utmost force and propriety.

It will, I am aware, be here said, that this interpretation derogates exceedingly from the nobleness and expansiveness of the apostle's benevolence, as exhibited in the construction which I am opposing. It seems to me that *St. Paul's own meaning* is as really valuable as any which is devised for him by his commentators. There can be no more dangerous mode of interpreting the Scriptures, than to drop their obvious sense; and to substitute for it one which happens to be more agreeable to ourselves. Were I to comment in this manner on the passage before us, I should say, that the meaning to which I object is absurd and monstrous; and that which I adopt, becoming the apostle's character. At the same time, I would lay no stress on this remark. My concern is with the real sense of the words. St. Paul must be allowed to have spoken good sense: and this the obvious and grammatical construction here given to his language makes him speak. Whereas the construction which I oppose, makes him speak little less than absolute nonsense.

These two passages therefore, although relied on to support the doctrine which I oppose, do not affect the question at all; and the Scriptures are equally destitute of examples, as of precepts to warrant the doctrine.

5thly. *There is no motive to induce the mind to this resignation.*

By this I do not intend that no motive is alleged, but that there is none by which the mind of a rational being can be supposed to be influenced. The motives by which Christians are induced to be unwilling to suffer perdition are; 1st, the loss of endless and perfect happiness in heaven; 2dly, the loss of endless and perfect virtue, or holiness; 3dly, the suffering of endless and perfect sin; 4thly, the

suffering of endless and perfect misery; and 5thly, the glory of God in the salvation of a sinner. The motive which must produce the willingness in question, must be of sufficient magnitude to overbalance all these; each of them infinite. Now what is the motive alleged? It is the delight experienced by the Christian in seeing the glory of his Maker promoted by his perdition. Without questioning the possibility of being influenced by this motive, as far as the *nature of the case* merely is concerned, I observe, that the willingness to glorify God in this manner, and the pleasure experienced in glorifying him (which is the same thing), is to endure but for a moment; that is, during this transient life. The pain through which this momentary pleasure is gained is, on the contrary, infinite, or endless, in each of the methods specified above. Will it be believed, that if *every volition of man is the greatest apparent good*, there can be in this case a volition, nay, a series of volitions, contrary to the greatest apparent good: a good infinitely outweighing that by which these volitions are supposed to be excited. I say, this good is momentary, because the subjects of perdition, immediately after entering upon their sufferings, hate and oppose the glory of God throughout eternity. Whatever good therefore the Christian can enjoy in glorifying his Creator, he can enjoy only during the present life.

It ought to be observed, that the resignation here required of the Christian, extends infinitely beyond that which was required of Christ himself. *He* was required to undergo only finite and temporary sufferings. *The Christian* is here required to be willing to undergo infinite sufferings. The sufferings of Christ were, and he knew they were to be, rewarded with infinite glory and happiness. Those of the Christian are only to terminate, daily, in increasing shame, sin, and woe, for ever. Christ, *for the joy set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame.* There is no joy set before the Christian.

As a rule of determining whether we are Christians, or not, it would seem, that hardly any supposable one could be more unhappy. If we should allow the doctrine to be sound and scriptural; it will not be pretended, that any, unless very eminent, saints arrive at the possession of the spi-

rit in such a degree, as to be satisfied that they are thus resigned. None but these therefore will be able to avail themselves of the evidence derived from this source. To all others the rule will be, not only useless, but in a high degree perplexing, and filled with discouragement. To be thus resigned, will, to say the least, demand a vigour and energy of piety not often found. Rules of self-examination, incomparably plainer, and more easy of application, are given us in the Scriptures, fitted for all persons, and for all cases. Why, with those in our possession, we should resort to this, especially when it is no where found in the sacred volume, it would be difficult to explain. Yet if this is not the practical use to be made of this doctrine, it would not be easy to assign to it any use at all.

The resignation of the Scriptures, as I have before observed, is either a cheerful submission to the evils which we actually suffer, or a general undefinable preparation of mind to suffer such others as God may choose to inflict. In the Bible this spirit is, I believe, never referred to any evils which exist beyond the grave. If this remark be just, as I think it will be found, there can be no benefit in extending the subject farther than it has been extended by revelation. If I mistake not, every good consequence, expected from the doctrine which I have opposed, will be derived from the resignation here described: while the mind will be disembarrassed of the very numerous and very serious difficulties which are inseparable from the doctrine in question.

2dly. *Resignation, as here described, is an indispensable duty of mankind.*

The government of God, even in this melancholy world, is the result of his perfect wisdom, power, and goodness. Now nothing is more evident, than that the government which flows from such a source, must be absolutely right; or, in other words, must be what perfect wisdom and virtue in us would certainly and entirely approve. To be resigned to such a government therefore, would be a thing of course, were we perfectly wise and virtuous. But what this character would prompt us to do, it is now our indispensable duty to do.

This however is not the only nor the most affecting view which we are able to take of the subject. The government of God in this world is a scheme of mercy; the most glorious exhibition which can exist of infinite goodness. Unless our own perverseness prevent, the most untoward, the most afflicting, dispensations, however painful in themselves, are really fitted in the best manner to promote our best interests. *We know*, says St. Paul, *that all things do work*, or, as in the Greek, *labour together for good for them that love God.*

"Good," says Mr. Hervey,

> "Good, when he gives, supremely good,
> Nor less when he denies;
> Ev'n crosses from his sov'reign hand
> Are blessings in disguise."

Surely in such a state of things it must be the natural, the instinctive conduct of piety, to acquiesce in dispensations of this nature. Under the afflictions which it demands, and which of course it cannot but involve, we may and must at times smart, as a child under the rod, when administered by the most affectionate parental hand: but like children influenced by filial piety, we shall receive the chastening with resignation and love.

3dly. *Resignation is also a most profitable duty.*

The profit of this spirit, is the increase which it always brings of virtue and happiness. Our pride and passion, by which we are naturally and of choice governed, conduct us only to guilt and suffering. So long as their dominion over us continues, we daily become more sinful and more miserable, as children become during the continuance of their rebellion against their parents. The first step towards peace, comfort, or hope, in this case, is to obtain a quiet, submissive spirit. That God will order the things of the world as we wish, ignorant and sinful as we are, cannot be for a moment believed. The only resort which remains for us, therefore, is to be satisfied with what he actually does; and to believe, that what he does is wise and good, and if he will permit it, wise and good for *us*. To be able

to say, *Thy will be done,* says Dr. Young, "will lay the loudest storm;" whether of passion within, or affliction without.

Children, when they have been punished, are often, and if dutiful children, always, more affectionate, and dutiful, and amiable, than before. Just such is the character of the children of God, when they exercise evangelical resignation under his chastening hand. Every one of them, like David, finds it *good for himself that he has been afflicted;* an increase of his comfort; an increase of his virtue and loveliness.

As this disposition regards events not yet come to pass, its effects are of the same desirable nature. For the wisdom and goodness, the fitness and beneficial tendency, of all that is future, the pious mind will rely with a steady confidence on the perfect character of God. With this reliance it will regularly believe, that there is good interwoven with all the real, as well as apparent evil, which from time to time may take place. With this habitual disposition in exercise, the resigned man will be quiet and satisfied, or at least supported, when others are borne down; and filled with hope and comfort, when worldly men sink in despair. All that dreadful train of fears, distresses, and hostilities, which, like a host of besiegers, assault the unresigned and sack their peace, he will have finally put to flight. Safety and serenity have entered the soul: and the Spirit of truth has there found a permanent mansion. Whatever evils still remain in it, his delightful influence gradually removes, as cold, and frost, and snow, vanish before the beams of the vernal sun. He will yield God his own place and province, and rejoice that *his throne is prepared in the heavens,* and that *his kingdom is over all.* His own station he will at the same time cheerfully take with the spirit of a dutiful and faithful subject, or an obedient child; and confide in the divine wisdom for such allotments as are best suited to make him virtuous, useful, and happy. In this manner he will disarm afflictions of their sting, and deprive temptations of their danger, and his spiritual enemies of their success, by quietly committing himself and his interests to the disposal of his Maker. In this manner he will become effectually prepared for that glorious and happy world, in

which all these evils will have *passed away;* and be succeeded by a new, divine, and eternal, train of enjoyments. In this manner *the work of righteousness* in his mind *will be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.*

SERMON XCVI.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT. LOVE TO OUR NEIGHBOUR.

And the second is like, namely this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.—MARK XII. 31.

IN several preceding discourses, I have considered the great duties of *love, reverence,* and *humility, towards God,* and *resignation to his will:* and given a summary account of *the other duties of piety.* I shall now proceed to an examination of *the second command.*

In this precept we are required *to love our neighbour as ourselves.* In canvassing the duty here enjoined I shall consider,

I. *Its nature;* and,

II. *Its extent.*

I. *I shall make a few observations concerning the nature of this duty.*

Before I proceed directly to this subject, it will be proper to remind my audience, that in the discourse concerning *love,* considered as *an attendant of regeneration,* I exhibited it at length as *a disinterested disposition;* and *in this particular view,* exhibited *its nature,* so far as is necessary to this system. Nothing farther will be needed under this

head except *an explanation of the degree* in which we are required to love our neighbour, expressed in the words *as thyself*.

This phraseology has been very differently understood by different persons. Some have supposed it to contain a direction, *that we should love our neighbour with the same kind of love which is exercised towards ourselves.* This plainly cannot be its meaning. The love which we usually and naturally exercise towards ourselves, is selfish and sinful. Such a love as this may be, and often is, exercised towards our children, and other darling connexions; and wherever it exists, is of course sinful; and cannot therefore have been commanded by God. At the same time it is physically impossible, that we should exercise it towards our fellow-creatures at large; the real objects of the affection required in the text; as I shall have occasion to shew under the second head. Others have insisted, *that we are required to love them in the same manner as ourselves.* This cannot be the meaning. For we love ourselves inordinately; unreasonably; without candour or equity; even when the kind of love is really evangelical. Others still have supposed, that the command obliges us *to love our neighbour in exactly the same degree in which we ought to love ourselves.* This interpretation, though nearer the truth than the others, is not, I apprehend, altogether agreeable to the genuine meaning of the text. It has, if I mistake not, been heretofore shewn satisfactorily, that we are in our very nature capable of understanding, realizing, and feeling, whatever pertains to ourselves, more entirely than the same things when pertaining to others; that our own concerns are committed to us by God in a peculiar manner; that God has made it in a peculiar manner our duty to *provide for our own; especially for those of our own households*; and that thus a regard to ourselves and those who are ours, is our duty in a peculiar degree. To these things it may be justly added, that we are not bound to love all those included under the word neighbour in the same degree. Some of these persons are plainly of much greater importance to mankind than others; are possessed of greater talents, of higher excellence, and more usefulness. Whether we make their happiness or their excellence the object of our love;

in other words, whether we regard them with benevolence or complacency; we ought plainly to make a difference, and often a wide one, between them; because they obviously and exceedingly differ in their characters and circumstances. A great, excellent, and useful man, such as St. Paul was, certainly claims a higher degree of love from us, than a person totally inferior to him in these characteristics.

Besides, if this rule of entire equality had been intended in the command, we ought certainly to have been enabled, *in the natural sense*, to perform this duty. But it is perfectly evident, that no man, however well disposed, can exactly measure, on all occasions, the degree of love exercised by him towards his neighbour or towards himself; or determine, in many cases, whether he has or has not loved himself and his neighbour in the same degree. It is plain therefore, that according to this scheme, we cannot, however well inclined, determine whether we do or do not perform our duty. But it is incredible that God should make this conduct our duty; and yet leave us, *in the natural sense*, wholly unable to perform it.

For these and various other reasons I am of opinion, that the precept in the text requires us *to love our neighbour generally and indefinitely as ourselves*. The love which we exercise towards him, is ever to be the same in kind which we ought to exercise towards ourselves; regarding both ourselves and him as members of the intelligent kingdom; as interested substantially in the same manner in the divine favour; as in the same manner capable of happiness, moral excellence, and usefulness; of being instruments of glory to God, and of good to our fellow-creatures; as being originally interested alike in the death of Christ, and, with the same general probability heirs of eternal life. This explanation seems to be exactly accordant with the language of the text. *As* does not always denote exact equality. Frequently it indicates equality in a general indefinite sense; and not unfrequently a strong resemblance, approximating towards an equality. There is no proof, that it intends an exact equality in the text.

In many cases; for example in most cases of commutative justice, and in many of distributive justice; it is in

our power to render to others, exactly that which we render to ourselves. Here, I apprehend, exactness becomes the measure of our duty. The love which I have here described, is evidently disinterested; and would, in our own case, supply motives to our conduct so numerous, and so powerful, as to render selfish affections useless to us. Selfishness, therefore, is a principle of action totally unnecessary to intelligent beings as such; even for their own benefit.

II. *The love here required extends to the whole intelligent creation.*

This position I shall illustrate by the following observations.

1st. *That it extends to our families, friends, and countrymen, will not be questioned.*

2dly. *That it extends to our enemies, and by consequence to all mankind, is decisively taught by our Saviour in a variety of scriptural passages. Ye have heard that he hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good: and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.* Matt. v. 43, &c. And again; *For if ye love them who love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. But I say unto you, love ye your enemies; and do good, and lend; hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great; and ye shall be called the children of the Highest.* Luke vi. 32. 35. The term *neighbour*, in this precept, is explained by Christ, at the request of a Scribe, in the parable of the good Samaritan: Luke x. 25: and with unrivalled force, and irresistible conviction, is shewn to include the worst and bitterest enemies. Concerning this subject the Scriptures have left no room for debate.

At the same time, it cannot but be satisfactory and useful to examine this subject, as it appears in its nature, and is connected with other kindred moral subjects.

It is well known that the Pharisees held the doctrine, that

while we were bound to love our neighbour, that is, our friends, it was lawful to hate our enemies. It is equally well known, that multitudes in every succeeding age have imbibed the same doctrine; and that in our own age and land, enlightened as we are by the sunshine of the gospel, there are not wanting multitudes who adopt the same doctrine; and insist, not only that they may lawfully hate their enemies, but also revenge themselves on such as have injured them with violent and extreme retribution.

On this subject I observe,

1st. *That the command to love our enemies, is enforced by the example of God.*

This is the very argument used to enforce this precept by our Saviour. *Love ye your enemies; and do good to them that hate you; and ye shall be called the children of the Highest; for he is kind to the evil and unthankful. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father who is in heaven is merciful.* The example of God is possessed of infinite authority. We see in it the conduct which infinite wisdom dictates, and in which it delights; and learn the rules of action by which it is pleased to govern itself. All that is thus dictated and done, is supremely right and good. If we wish our own conduct to be right and good; we shall become *followers of God, as dear children,* in all his imitable conduct; and particularly in that which is so strongly commended to our imitation. Christ also, who has presented to our view in his own life the conduct of God in such a manner as to be more thoroughly understood, and more easily copied by us, has in his prayer for his murderers, while suspended on the cross, enforced the precept in the text with unrivalled energy. Nothing could with greater power, or more commanding loveliness, require us to *go and do likewise.*

To hate our enemies, is directly opposed to the authority and the glory of these examples. The examples are divinely excellent and lovely; the conduct opposed to them is of course altogether vile and hateful. Accordingly, this conduct is exhibited to us for the purpose of commending the same precept also to our obedience, as the conduct of the worst of men. These love their friends, and hate their enemies; even publicans and sinners do this, and all who

do this, and nothing more, bear a moral resemblance to publicans and sinners.

2dly. *If we are bound to love those only who are friends to us, we are under no obligation to love God any longer than while he is our friend.*

If we are not bound to love our enemies, whenever God becomes an enemy to us, we are not bound to love him. Of course, those who are finally condemned, are freed from all obligation to love God, because he is their enemy. In refusing to love him, therefore, they are guilty of no sin; but are thus far perfectly innocent, and perfectly excellent, because they do that which is perfectly right. Neither the happiness nor the excellence of God furnishes any reason, according to this scheme, why we should regard him either with benevolence or complacency. In the same manner every person in the present world can, by committing the unpardonable sin, release himself from all obligation to love his Maker; because in this manner he renders God his enemy. In the same manner, every person under a sentence of reprobation, is released from his obligation to love God; and persons of both these characters are thenceforth entirely innocent and unblamable. According to this doctrine also, sinners can, and do, continually lessen their obligation to love God, in proportion as they make him more and more angry with them day by day. By advancing, therefore, in a course of opposition and disobedience to God, they advance nearer and nearer to an unblamable life and character.

3dly. *According to this doctrine, good men are not bound in ordinary cases to love sinners.*

That sinners are ordinarily enemies to good men, will not be questioned; that they often are very bitter enemies, cannot be denied. If, then, this doctrine be true, good men are plainly not bound to love them, nor, of course, to befriend them; to relieve their distresses; to promote their happiness; nor to seek their salvation.

4thly. *According to this doctrine, sinners are not ordinarily bound to love each other.*

Sinners are not only enemies to good men, but to each other. In every such case, they are relieved from all obligation to love each other; and, so long as they continue

to be enemies, are justified not only in the sight of man but in the sight of God also, in withholding their love, and the expression of it, from each other.

Let us now for a moment attend to the necessary and practical consequences of this doctrine. A moral being, whose moral conduct is such as to justify us in withholding our love from him, cannot be regarded with indifference; but must of course be hated; and, so far as I can see, may justifiably be hated, because his character is really hateful. But if it be right to hate our enemies, it is undoubtedly right to exhibit our hatred of them in its proper expressions; such as censure, punishment, and hostilities. On this principle mankind would contend with each other in their public and private controversies, on the ground that it was right; because it was dictated by conscience, and not merely by passion. He who beheld an enemy, would be justified in hating him; and he who was thus hated, would on the same ground be justified in reciprocating the hatred. To express this justifiable hatred in quarrels, would be equally accordant with rectitude; and men would fight each other on a new basis of principle. Revenge would be accounted *doing God service.* The persecutor, burning with rage against the miserable victims of his cruelty, exulting in his successful ravages of human happiness, and smiling over the tortures of the rack and the agonies of the flame, would with new confidence say, "Let the Lord be glorified." War, instead of being the conflict of pride, avarice, ambition, and wrath, would be changed into a universal crusade of piety; and new Mohammeds would stalk through the world, to execute righteousness by butchery, and plant truth with the sword. Every national contest would become a war of extermination. Every land would be changed, by a professed spirit of righteousness, into a mere field of slaughter; and every age, by the mere dictates of conscience, converted into a period of unmingled and immeasurable woe.

The contrary principle in good men, wherever they are found, is an extensive source of the peace and comfort actually enjoyed in this unhappy world: and its influence on the consciences even of wicked men is such, as to effectuate no small quiet and comfort for themselves and others; and

to prevent much of the evil naturally flowing from this pernicious doctrine.

But the one half of the story is not yet told. Had God adopted this doctrine as the rule of his own conduct, what would long since have become of mankind? Sinners never love God, but always hate him; and of consequence rebel against his government, violate his law, and oppose his designs. In other words, they are uniformly and unceasingly his enemies. Had God then been governed by this principle; had he hated his enemies; nay, had he exercised no love, tenderness, or compassion, for them; he must immediately have exerted his infinite power to render them only and eternally miserable. In this case, no scheme of redemption would ever have been formed for our miserable race by the infinite mind. The compassionate and glorious Redeemer, instead of becoming incarnate, instead of living and dying for sinners, would have *clad himself* only *with vengeance as a cloak;* and arrayed himself with anger as a robe and a diadem. Instead of ascending the cross, and entering the tomb, he would nearly *have trodden the wine-press alone, and trampled the people in his fury. Their blood would have been sprinkled on his garments, and stained all his raiment. The day of vengeance* only would have been *in his heart; and the year of his redeemed* would have never *come.*

No *sun* would now *rise upon the unjust:* no *rain descend upon the evil and unthankful.* The word of life would never have been revealed to mankind. The sabbath, with its serene, peaceful, and cheering beams, would never have dawned upon this melancholy world; nor the sanctuary unfolded its doors, that sinners might enter in and be saved. The voice of Mercy would never have been heard within its hallowed walls. God would never, with infinite tenderness, have called rebels and apostates to faith, repentance, and holiness, in the Lord Jesus Christ; nor proffered pardon and peace to the returning penitent.

Heaven would never have opened the gates of life and glory to this ruined world. The *general assembly of the first-born* would never have been gathered; nor would that divine kingdom, which shall for ever increase in its peace and prosperity, its virtue and glory, ever have begun.

The fairest attribute, the peculiar excellence, of the Godhead, the divine mercy, would neither have been unfolded nor existed. Angels would never have sung, *Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth; and good-will towards men.* On the contrary, sin without bounds, and misery without end, would have reigned with an uninterrupted and eternal dominion over all the millions of the race of Adam.

From these considerations it is unanswerably evident, that all mankind are included under the word *neighbour.*

3dly. *This term, of course, extends to all other intelligent beings, so far as they are capable of being objects of love;* or, in other words, *so far as they are capable of being happy.*

To desire the happiness of beings who cannot be happy, is to exercise our affections in vain. To desire the happiness of those whom God has doomed for their sins to everlasting suffering, is to oppose his known declared will. But even in these extreme cases, it is, I apprehend, our duty to feel a general spirit of benevolence towards the miserable sufferers. God has informed us, that *he has not pleasure in the death of the wicked.* It is undoubtedly right and proper for us to experience the same disposition. This doctrine may be illustrated in the following manner. Were we to receive tidings from God, that these unhappy beings would, at some future period, be restored to holiness and happiness; every being, under the influence of this love, would rejoice with inexpressible joy; and would find, that instead of indulging enmity towards them, he had ever been ready to exercise a benevolent concern for their welfare.

That virtuous beings, throughout the universe, are proper objects of this love, will hardly be disputed. Of these beings, angels only are known to us; and their character, as unfolded in the Scriptures, is a complete proof of this position. To mankind they are related, merely, as intelligent creatures of the same God. Yet they cheerfully become ministering spirits for the benefit of men; inhabitants of a distant world; of the humblest intelligent character; enemies to their Creator; enemies to themselves. Such an example decides this point without a comment.

4thly. *The love required in this precept, extends in its*

operations to all the good offices which we are capable of rendering to others.

The benevolence enjoined by God, is, as was formerly observed, an active principle, prompting those whom it controls to exert themselves in all the modes of beneficence which are in their power, and are required by the circumstances of their fellow-men. Infinitely different from the cold philanthropy of modern philosophers, which spends itself in thoughts and words, in sighs and tears, its whole tendency is to employ itself in the solid and useful acts of kindness, by which the real good of others is efficaciously promoted. This philanthropy overlooks the objects which are around it, and within its reach; and exhausts itself in pitying sufferers in foreign lands and distant ages: sufferers so distant as to be incapable of receiving relief from any supposable beneficence which it might exercise. These are, indeed, most convenient objects of such a philanthropy. For, as it is impossible to do them good by any acts of kindness which are in our power, we naturally feel ourselves released from the obligation to attempt any such acts; and thus enjoy, with no small self-complacency, the satisfaction of believing, that, although we do no good, we are still very benevolent; and are contented with thinking over the good which we would do, were the objects of our benevolent wishes within our reach. It is remarkable, that all kindness of this nature is ardent and vivid upon paper, and flourishes thriftily in conversation; but, whenever it is summoned to action by the sight of those whom it ought to befriend, it languishes, sickens, and dies. Its seat is only in the imagination; and unfortunately it has no connexion either with the purse, the hand, or the heart. In the same manner, professed hospitality is often struck dumb by the arrival of a guest; and boasted patriotism, at the appearance of a proposed subscription for some beneficial public purpose.

Such is not the love of the gospel. The happiness of others is its original, commanding object; and the promotion of that happiness its employment and delight. The objects for whom, and the manner in which, it is to be employed, are felt to be of no consequence, if good can

really be done. The kind of good is also a matter of indifference; provided it be real, and as extensive as the nature of the case will admit.

It will be useful to illustrate this subject in a number of particulars, sufficient to exhibit its tendency and extent, in the variety of its operations.

First. *The love required in this precept, will prevent us from voluntarily injuring others.*

Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. The stress here laid upon this characteristic of love is remarkable. For St. Paul declares, that for this reason it is the fulfilling of the law. We are not, indeed, to understand, that this is the *only* reason; but that it is one very important lesson. At the same time we are to remember, that voluntary beings, who do no ill, always, and of course, do good.

From this characteristic of evangelical love we learn, that those who are controlled by it cannot be the authors of falsehood, fraud, slander, sophistry, seduction, pollution, quarrels, oppression, plunder, or war. All these, in whatever degree they exist, are real, and usually are great, injuries to others. These therefore are in no sense fruits of love. They may, and do indeed, exist in greater or less degrees, in the minds and lives of those who are the subjects of it; but it is because their love is partial and imperfect. Were this spirit to become the universal and the only character of mankind; what a mighty mass of human calamities would vanish from the world!

Secondly. Among the positive acts of beneficence dictated by the love of the gospel, *the contribution of our property* forms an interesting part. To feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, and to perform other acts, generally of the same nature, have, by mankind at large, been esteemed such eminent and important specimens of this spirit, as to have appropriated to themselves the very name of *charity;* that is, of *love;* to the exclusion of other efforts not less truly benevolent. They are, at the same time, accompanied, more obviously than most other communications of beneficence, by the appearance of self-denial, and of doing good without reference to a reward.

But although acts of this kind are peculiarly amiable,

and peculiarly respected, they are still no more really dictated by evangelical love, than the contribution of our property to the purposes of hospitality, to the support of schools and colleges, the erection of churches, the maintenance of ministers, and the support of government. All these are important means of human happiness; and he, who does not cheerfully contribute to them is either ignorant of their nature, and his own duty, or is destitute of evangelical benevolence.

Thirdly. *Love to our neighbour dictates also every other office of kindness which may promote his present welfare.*

Under this extensive head are comprehended, our instruction of others; our advice; our countenance; our reproof; our sympathy with them in their joys and sorrows; those which are called our civilities; our obligingness of deportment; our defence of their good name; our professional assistance; our peculiar efforts for their relief and comfort, on occasions which peculiarly demand them; and, especially, those kind offices which are always needed by the sick and afflicted. The tendency of love, like that of the needle to the pole, is steadily directed to the promotion of happiness, and of course to the relief of distress. The cases in which this object can be obtained, and the modes in which it can be accomplished, are of no consequence in the eye of love. It only asks the questions, how, when, and where, good can be done. When these are satisfactorily answered, it is ever ready to act with vigour and efficacy to the production of any good; except that it is regularly disposed to devote its labours, especially, to that which is especially necessary. As its sole tendency is to promote happiness; it is evident, that it cannot but be ready to act for this end, in whatever manner may be in its power. He therefore who is willing to do good in some cases and not in others, will find little reason to believe, that he possesses the benevolence of the gospel.

Fourthly. *Love to our neighbour is especially directed to the good of his soul.*

As the soul is of more worth than the body; as the interests of eternity are more important than those of time; so the immortal concerns of man demand, proportionally, the good-will and the kind offices of his fellow-men. In

discharging the duties created by this great object of benevolence, we are required to instruct, counsel, reprove, rebuke, restrain, encourage, comfort, support, and invigorate, them, so far as it shall be in our power. We are also bound to forgive cheerfully their unkindness to us; to bear with their frowardness; to endure patiently their slowness of apprehension or reformation; and to repeat our efforts for their good; as we have opportunity, unto the end. For this purpose we are bound *to hope concerning them, so long as hope can be exercised;* that neither we nor they may be discouraged; and *to pray for them without ceasing.* All these offices of kindness are the immediate dictates of evangelical love. He therefore who does not perform them, in some good measure at least, can lay no claim to the benevolence of the gospel.

REMARKS.

1st. *From these observations it is evident, that the second great command of the moral law is, as it is expressed in the text, like the first.*

It is not only prescribed by the same authority, and possessed of the same obligation, unalterable and eternal; but it enjoins exactly the exercise of the same disposition. The love required in this command, is exactly the same which is required in the first: a single character, operating now towards God, and now towards our fellow-creatures. Equally does it resemble the first in its importance. *That* regulates all our conduct towards God; this towards other intelligent beings. Each is of infinite importance; each is absolutely indispensable. If either did not exist, or were not obeyed; a total and dreadful chasm would be found in the virtue and happiness of the universe. United, they perfectly provide for both. The duty prescribed in the first, is undoubtedly first in the order: but that prescribed by the last is no less indispensable to the glory of God, and the good of the intelligent creation.

2dly. *Piety and morality are here shewn to be inseparable.*

It has, I trust, been satisfactorily evinced, that the love required in the divine law is a single disposition: indivi-

sible in its nature; diversified and distinguishable only as exercised towards different objects. When exercised towards God, it is called *piety;* when exercised towards mankind, it is customarily styled morality. Wherever both objects are known, both are loved of course by every one in whom this disposition exists. He therefore who loves not God, loves not man; and he who does not love man, does not love God.

3dly. *We here see, that the religion of the Scriptures is the true and only source of all the duties of life.*

On the obedience of the first and great commandment, is founded the obedience of the second: and *on these two hang all the law and the prophets:* the precepts of Christ, and the instructions of the apostles. Religion commences with love to God; and terminates in love to man. Thus begun, and thus ended, it involves every duty; and produces every action which is rewardable, praiseworthy, or useful. There is nothing which ought to be done, which it does not effectuate: there is nothing which ought not to be done, which it does not prevent. It makes intelligent creatures virtuous and excellent. It makes mankind good parents and children, good husbands and wives, good brothers and sisters, good neighbours and friends, good rulers and subjects; and renders families, neighbourhoods, and states, orderly, peaceful, harmonious, and happy. As it produces the punctual performance of all the duties, so it effectually secures all the rights of mankind. For *rights in us are nothing but just claims to the performance of duties by others.* Thus the religion of the Scriptures is the true and only source of safety, peace, and prosperity, to the world.

SERMON XCVII.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT. THE EFFECTS OF BENEVOLENCE ON PERSONAL HAPPINESS.

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.—ACTS xx. 35.

IN the preceding discourse I considered, at some length, that love to our neighbour which is required in the second command of *the moral law*. I shall now attempt to shew, *that this disposition is more productive of happiness than any other*.

The speech of St. Paul recorded in this chapter I have long considered as the most perfect example of pathetic eloquence ever uttered by man. The occasion, the theme, the sentiments, the doctrines, the style, are all of the most exquisite kind, wholly suited to each other, and calculated to make the deepest impression on those who heard him. *The elders of the church of Ephesus*, to whom it was addressed, were ministers of the gospel; converts to Christianity made by himself; his own spiritual children, who owed to him, under God, their deliverance from endless sin and misery, and their attainment of endless holiness and happiness. They were endeared to him, as he was to them, by the tenderest of all possible ties; presiding over a church formed in the capital of one of the principal countries in the world; at a period when heresy, contention, and dissoluteness, were prophetically seen by him to be advancing with hasty strides to ruin Christianity in that region. This address was therefore delivered at a time when all that was dear *to him* or *them* was placed in the most imminent hazard of speedy destruction. *They* were the persons from whom almost all the exertions were to be expected, which

might avert this immense evil, and secure the contrary inestimable good: the shepherds, in whose warm affection, care, and faithfulness, lay the whole future safety of the flock. *He* was the apostle by whom the flock had been gathered into the fold of Christ, and by whom the shepherds were formed, qualified, and appointed. He had now come for the great purpose of admonishing them of their own duty, and of the danger of the flock committed to their charge. He met them with the tenderness of a parent visiting his children after a long absence. He met them for the last time. He assembled them to hear his last farewell on this side the grave.

To enforce their duty in the strongest manner, he begins his address with reminding them of his manner of life, his piety, faithfulness, zeal, tenderness for them, disinterestedness of conduct, fortitude under the severest sufferings, diligence in preaching the gospel, steady dependance on God, and entire devotion to the great business of the salvation of men. To them, as eye-witnesses, he appeals for the truth of his declarations. *Them* he charges solemnly before God, to follow his example: warning them of approaching and accumulating evil: and commending them to the protection, and grace, and truth, of God, for their present safety, and future reward.

With this extensive, most solemn, and most impressive preparation, he closes his discourse in a word, *with the great truth which he wished to enforce, and the great duty which he wished to enjoin*, as the sum and substance of all his instructions, precepts, and example; exhorting them to *remember the words of the Lord Jesus, which he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

In no remains of Demosthenes or Cicero can be found the same simplicity, address, solemnity, tenderness, and sublimity, united. Paul was a man immensely superior to either of these celebrated orators in excellence of character; and with the aid of Christianity to influence, and inspiration to direct, rose to a height, and enlarged his views to an extent, of which no other man was ever capable. His eloquence, like the poetry of Isaiah, rises beyond every parallel; and the excellence of his disposition seconded in a glorious manner the greatness of his views, the tenderness of

his sentiments, and the sublimity of his conceptions. He speaks as if he indeed possessed the tongue of angels; and the things which he utters are such as angels, without superior aid, would never have been able to conceive.

The words which he declares to have been spoken by the Saviour, are no where recorded in the Gospels as having been uttered in the manner here specified. They were however unquestionably the words of Christ; and not improbably addressed to Paul himself. Be this as it may, they are words of the highest possible import; and may be justly considered as the language of all our Saviour's preaching, and of all his conduct. The spirit by which he was governed, they perfectly describe; the actions which he performed, and the sufferings which he underwent, they perfectly explain. Of all his precepts they are a complete summary; and of his whole character, as a moral being, they are a succinct, but full and glorious, exhibition.

The import of them cannot be easily mistaken, unless from choice. *To give*, is a universal description of *communicating good; to receive*, an equally-extended description of *gaining it from others*. The former of these two kinds of conduct is pronounced here to be happier or *more blessed* than the latter. *To be blessed*, is to receive happiness from God, from our fellow-creatures, or from ourselves; and denotes, therefore, *all the good which we do now*, or *shall hereafter enjoy*. The doctrine of the text is therefore that,

It is more desirable to communicate happiness, than to receive it from others.

I am aware that the selfishness, which dwells in every human mind, and clouds every human intellect, as well as biasses every human decision concerning moral subjects, revolts at this doctrine. To admit it, is a plain condemnation of our ruling character, and a judicial sentence of reprobation on all our conduct. *In a world of selfish beings*, where one universal disposition reigns and ravages; it cannot but be expected by a man, even moderately versed in human nature, that the general suffrage will be given in favour of the general character. Every man knows that his own cause is in question; and that his vote is an acquittal or condemnation of himself. From this interested tribunal an impartial issue cannot be hoped. *In a virtuous world*,

instead of that proverbial and disgraceful aphorism, that, *where you find a man's interest you find the man*, the nobler and more vindicable sentiment, *that we should find the man where we find his duty*, would unquestionably prevail. If the united voice of our race therefore should decide against this great evangelical doctrine, *the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect*, may be easily expected to give their unqualified decision in its favour. In their happy residence, a selfish being would be a prodigy as well as a monster.

Even in our own world, we may, however, lay hold on facts which fully evince the doctrine to be possible. *Parents* are often found preferring the happiness of their children to their own personal and private good, and enjoying more satisfaction in communicating good to *them*, than in gaining it from the hands of *others*. Friends have frequently found their chief happiness in promoting the well-being of the objects of their friendship. *Patriots* have, sometimes at least, cheerfully forgotten all private concerns, and neglected the whole business of gaining personal gratification, for the sake of rendering important services to their beloved country. The apostles also, with a spirit eminently disinterested and heavenly, cheerfully sacrificed every private consideration for the divine purpose of accomplishing the salvation of their fellow-men. Nothing of this nature "*moved them, neither counted they their lives dear unto themselves; so that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry which they had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

Now what forbids; what I mean in the nature of things; that, with an affection as tender and vigorous as parents feel for their children, and friends for their friends; which patriots have at times felt for their country, and which the apostles of Christ felt for the souls of their fellow-men; we should, in a nobler state of existence, escape from the bonds of selfishness, and send forth our good-will to every intelligent being whom we know, in such a manner, as to take delight in the happiness of all around us, and to experience our first enjoyment in communicating good, wherever we could find a recipient. That such a disposition would be a desirable one, will not be disputed. Why may it not

exist? What is there which will of necessity forbid such enlargement, excellency, and dignity, of moral character? Why may not a world be filled with intelligent beings devoted to this great and godlike end, and gloriously exhibiting the image and beauty of their Creator? The only answer to these questions which an opponent can bring is, that in this guilty, wretched world, the contrary spirit universally prevails. On the same ground, the tenants of a jail may rationally determine, that the mass of fraud, theft, rape, and murder, for which they are consigned to chains and gibbets, is the true and only character which exists in the palace of sovereignty, the hall of legislation, the household of piety, and the church of God.

Admitting then, that such a disposition is possible; admitting that it has, at least in superior worlds, a real existence; admitting still farther, as all who really believe the dictates of the gospel must admit, that it exists in every sincere Christian, even in *this* world: I proceed to establish the doctrine by observing,

I. *That all the happiness which is enjoyed in the universe, flows originally from the voluntary activity of intelligent beings.*

All happiness is *contrived;* and is brought into existence by carrying that contrivance into execution. Intelligent beings alone can contrive or execute. From them, from their voluntary agency, therefore, all happiness springs. God, the GREAT INTELLIGENT, began this wonderful and immense work. Intelligent creatures, endued with the faculties necessary for this purpose, coincide with him, as instruments, in carrying on the vast design. On the part of him, or them, or both, it is the result of design. If happiness, then, is to exist at all, it must flow from disposition; and plainly from a disposition *to do good:* this, and a disposition to do evil, being the only active and productive principles in the whole nature of things. A disposition to gain happiness from others could plainly produce nothing; and were there no other, the universe would be a blank, a desert, in which enjoyment could never be found. The capacity for it would indeed exist; but the means of filling it would be wanting. The channels would open, and wind;

but the living fountain with which they were to be supplied would be dry. The soil would be formed; and the seeds might be sown; but the life-giving influence of the rain and the sunshine would be withholden. Of course no verdure, flowers, nor fruits, would spring up to adorn and enrich the immense and desolate surface.

As great therefore as the difference is between the boundless good which exists, and for ever will exist, in the great kingdom of Jehovah, and an absolute barrenness and dearth throughout this incomprehensible field; so great is the difference between these two dispositions.

II. *Virtue, the supreme excellence and glory of intelligent beings, is merely the love of doing good.*

No attribute of a rational nature is, probably, so much commended, even in this sinful world, as virtue; yet the commendations given of it are, in many instances at least, unmeaning and confused; as if those who extol it had no definite ideas of its nature, and knew not in what its real value consists.

All the worth of virtue, in my own view, *lies in this; that it is the original, only voluntary, and universal, source of happiness;* partly as its affections are happy in themselves, and partly as they are the sources of all other happiness. *There is originally nothing valuable but happiness.* The value of virtue consists only in its efficacy to produce happiness. This is its value in the Creator; this its value in the creatures. Hence, and hence only, is virtue the ornament the excellency, and the loveliness, of intelligent beings.

Virtue, as exercised towards the Creator, is, as was shewn in a former discourse, summed up IN LOVE TO HIM; *in benevolence, complacency, and gratitude;* good-will to his supreme blessedness, and to the accomplishment of his glorious designs; a delight in his perfect character, which forms and accomplishes the boundless good of his creation; and a thankful reception and acknowledgment of the effects of his goodness, communicated either to ourselves or to others. All these are affections in the highest degree active; and prompt us to *study what we shall render to the Lord for his benefits,* and to co-operate with all our powers in the promotion of the designs which he has made

known to us. *All the good* indeed *which we can do to him*, if it may be called by this name, *is no other than to please him;* by exhibiting always a disposition like his own. With this disposition he is ever delighted; and he has been pleased to inform us, that *in his sight it is of great price.*

Virtue, as exercised towards our fellow-creatures, is the same love directed to them, and perfectly active in promoting their well-being.

In all the forms of justice, faithfulness, truth, kindness, compassion, charity, and forgiveness, in every act of self-denial and self-government, this is still the soul and substance. But virtue is a character beyond comprehension superior to any other, and in a literal some infinitely more desirable. It is the only worth, the only excellence, the only beauty of the mind; the only dignity; the only glory.

To the spirit which is occupied *in gaining good from others*, or which aims at enjoyment merely, it is transcendently superior, in numerous particulars.

It is the source of all internal moral good.

The mind is a world of itself; in which happiness of a high and refined kind can exist; a happiness without which external good can be of but little value. In the great business of forming happiness, its first concern is with itself. If disorder, tumult, and tempest, reign within, order, peace, and serenity from without, will find no admission. The first step towards real good is self-approbation. So long as the mind is necessitated to see itself deformed, odious, and contemptible; so long as the conscience reproaches and stings; so long as the affections are inordinate, base, insincere, rebellious, impious, selfish, and guilty; so long as fraud is cherished, truth rejected, sin loved, and duty opposed; it is impossible, that quiet, consolation, or hope, should find a residence there. Self-condemned, self-abhorred, self-despised, it must fly of design, from all conversasion with itself: and find its poor and transient pleasure in the forgetfulness of what it is, and in the hurry and bustle of external employments and companions. From the sweet and peaceful fire-side of harmonious and happy affections and purposes; from the household serenity of a satisfied conscience, and of a blameless life, it is forced abroad, to seek without success, to slake its thirst for hap-

piness in streets and taverns, in routs and riots. Sickly, pained, and languishing, it looks for health and ease in medicines which cannot reach the disease; and turns in vain for relief to sports and sounds, for which it has neither eye nor ear.

But when the love of doing good has once gained dominion over the man, he is become reconciled to his Creator, and to all his commands. This ruling disposition, wholly excellent and lovely in itself, is of course *seen to be lovely and excellent.* The conscience smiles with approbation on all the dictates of the heart. The mind becomes at once assured of its own amiableness and worth; and surveying the landscape within, beholds it formed of scenes exquisitely beautiful and desirable. The soul, barren and desolate before, is clothed, by the influence of the moral Sun, and the rain of heaven, with living verdure, and the blossoms and fruits of righteousness. All is pleasant; all is lovely to the eye. No tumult ruffles, no storm agitates. Peace soothes and hushes every disordered affection, and banishes every uneasy purpose; and serenity, like the summer evening, spreads a soft and mild lustre over the cheerful region. Possessed of new and real dignity, and assuming the character of a rational being, the man for the first time enjoys *himself;* and finds this enjoyment not only new, but noble and expansive; and while it furnishes perpetually varied and exquisite good, it sweetens and enhances all other good. From his happiness within, the transition to that which he finds without, is easy and instinctive. Of one part of this, himself is the immediate parent. When he surveys the objects to whom he has communicated happiness by relieving their distresses, or originating their enjoyments; the first thing, which naturally strikes his attention, is, *that their happiness is the work of his own hands.* In the exalted character of a benefactor, a voluntary and virtuous benefactor, he surveys and approves himself; not with pride and self-righteousness, but with humble gratitude to God, for vouchsafing to raise him up to such exaltation and worth, and to make him a willing instrument, in his hand, of the good of his fellow-creatures.

In this character, the man who seeks happiness *in gaining good* has no share. A child of sense, a mere animal,

his only business has been to taste and to swallow; while nobler and more active beings have been employed in producing the food on which he regales his appetite.

In this character of a common benefactor, the virtuous man is seen and acknowledged by others as well as by himself. By all who see him he is approved; and by the wise and good he is beloved. Conscience owns his worth; virtue esteems and loves it; and the public testimony repeats and applauds it. To the world he is considered as a blessing; and his memory survives the grave, fragrant and delightful to succeeding generations.

In the mean time, those who are most unlike him in character, pay an involuntary testimony to his worth. Whenever they seek esteem and commendation, they are obliged to profess his character, and to counterfeit his principles; to pretend to do good, and to seem to love the employment. In this conduct they unwillingly declare that there is no honour, and no worth, even in their view, beside *that* of which his character is formed.

In addition to these things, he is daily conscious of the approbation of God; a privilege, a blessing, transcending all other blessings; a good which knows no bounds of degree or duration. The proofs given of his approbation to this character, are such as to leave no room for doubt or question. It is, he has declared it to be, his own character. *God is love.* His law has demanded it as the only article of obedience to himself. *Love is the fulfilling of the law.* To this character, as formed in the soul through the redemption of Christ, all his promises are made. In consequence of the existence of this character, sin is forgiven; the soul justified; and the man adopted into the divine family, as a child of God, and an heir of eternal life. Of the approbation of God therefore he is secure. Think, I beseech you, of the nature of this enjoyment. Think of the character of him who approves. Think what it is to be approved by infinite wisdom. What a seal of worth; what a source of dignity; what a foundation of honour! How virtuous an ambition may be here gratified; what an immense capacity for happiness may here be filled!

Beyond the grave his excellence will find a complete reward. There, all around him will be wise and good; and

will joyfully feel and acknowledge, will esteem and applaud, his worth. Of their esteem and love, the testimonies will be sincere, undisguised, unchanged, and eternal. There he will be acknowledged and welcomed as one of the virtuous and happy number, who have voluntarily glorified God, and befriended the universe, during their earthly pilgrimage; and who are destined to the same delightful employments, and to the same glorious character, for ever. His heavenly Father will also there testify his own divine approbation in an open, full, and perfect manner; will adorn him with every grace; remove from him every stain; and advance him through successive stages of excellence which shall know no end.

It is the actual, and probably the necessary, law of intelligent nature, that we love those to whom we *do good*, more than those *who do good to us*. Thus God loves his intelligent creatures incomparably more than they can love him. Thus the Saviour loved mankind far more intensely, than his most faithful disciples ever loved him. Thus parents regard their children with a strength of affection, unknown in children towards their parents. Thus friends love those whom they have befriended, more than those who have befriended *them*. Thus also in other, and probably in all, cases. According to this undeniable scheme of things, he who seeks his happiness in doing good, is bound to his fellow-creatures, and to the universe, and will be eternally bound, by far stronger and tenderer ties than can otherwise exist. He will contemplate every fellow-creature, primarily, as an object of his own beneficence; and, while he feels a parental, a godlike attachment to all, will enjoy a delight in their prosperity, not unjustly styled divine. This glorious disposition will make the happiness of every being his own, as parents make that of their children. Even in this world he will thus multiply enjoyment, in a manner unknown to all others; and in the world to come will, in a progress for ever increasing and enlarging, find the most pure and exquisite delight springing up in his bosom wherever he dwells, and wherever he roves. His mind, a bright and polished mirror, will receive the light of the Sun of righteousness, and of all the stars which adorn the heavenly firmament: and will, at the same time, warm and

brighten within itself, and return the enlivening beams with undiminished lustre.

III. *To do good is the only and perfect character of the ever blessed Jehovah.*

When God created the universe, it is most evident, that he could have no possible view in this great work, but *to glorify himself in doing good to the creatures which he made* Whatever they were, and whatever they possessed, or could ever be or possess, must of course be derived from him alone. From them therefore he could receive nothing but what he had given them. Accordingly, *he is not worshipped as though he needed any thing; seeing he giveth unto all, life, and breath, and all things.* The whole system of his designs and conduct, is a mere system of communicating good; and his whole character, as displayed in it, is exactly summed up by the Psalmist in these few words; *Thou art good, and dost good, and thy tender mercies are over all thy works.* The same character was anciently proclaimed by himself to Moses, on mount Sinai, in that sublime and affecting annunciation; *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth.* St. John has, in a still more comprehensive manner, declared his character in a single word; *God is love.* This peculiarly divine and glorious character was still more illustriously manifested by the Son of God, in the wonderful work of redemption. Infinitely *rich* in all good himself, *for our sakes he became poor, that we through him might become rich;* rich in holiness; rich in the happiness which it produces. We were fallen, condemned, and ruined; *were poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked, and in want of all things.* To do good to us, to redeem us from sin, and to rescue us from misery, he came to this world; and while he lived, *went about doing good unto all men as he had opportunity,* and ended his life on the cross, that we might live for ever.

On the third day he arose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. At the right hand of God the Father, while he sits on the throne of the universe, he makes perpetual intercession for the sinful backsliding creatures whom he left behind, and with infinite benignity carries on the amaz-

ing work of redeeming love in the world of glory. In that world it is his employment and delight, *to feed* all his followers, *and lead them to fountains of living waters;* to enlighten them with wisdom, to improve them in virtue, to adorn them with strength and beauty, and to dignify them with immortal glory.

All these things have flowed, and will for ever flow, from his own love of doing good. Of them he could not possibly stand in need. *Of the stones* of the street, he could raise up *children* and followers, beyond measure better, wiser, and nobler, than they are, and in numbers incomprehensible. For him they can do nothing; for them he does all things.

But God is infinitely blessed. This superior and unchangeable happiness of Jehovah, springs entirely from this glorious disposition. As he can receive nothing, his happiness must lie wholly in the conscious enjoyment of his own excellence, which is formed of this disposition, and in the communication of good to his creatures.

If *we* would be happy like *him*, we must be disposed like him; must experience and exercise the same love of doing good; and must find our own supreme enjoyment in this exalted communication. Happiness grows out of the temper of the mind which enjoys. Its native soil is benevolence. When this is the temperature of the soul, it springs up spontaneously, and flourishes, and blossoms, and bears, with a rich and endless luxuriance, and with beauty supreme and transcendent: but when selfishness predominates, like an exotic in a sterile ground, and a wintry climate, it withers, fades, and dies.

In the mean time, God loves and blesses those whose disposition and conduct resemble his own. In giving this character to his children, he gives them the first of all blessings; the source of peace, dignity, and enjoyment, within, and the means of relishing every pleasure from without. Thus, in the possession of this character, *they have*, in the scriptural language; and therefore, *to them*, in other respects, *shall be largely given.* Their internal excellence and enjoyment shall be perpetually improved, and their external happiness, in the like manner, extended. As the mind becomes more beneficent, more pure, more active in

doing good; all the sources of its felicity will multiply around it: its consciousness of being like its Father and Redeemer will expand and refine; virtuous beings will more clearly see, approve, and love, its beauty and worth; and the smiles of infinite complacency will beam upon its character and conduct with inexpressible and transporting glory.

Having thus, as I flatter myself, shewn in a clear light the truth of the doctrine contained in the text; I shall now close the discourse with two

REMARKS.

1st. *This doctrine places, in the strongest point of view, the superiority of the gospel to every other system of morals.*

There are two classes of men, both very numerous, who have employed themselves in forming moral systems for mankind: *viz.* the ancient Heathen philosophers and modern infidels. It is hardly necessary to observe, that in all moral systems, the supreme good, or highest interest, of man, and by consequence the nature of virtue, and the nature and means of happiness, become of course prime objects of inquiry. Nothing can more effectually teach us, the insufficiency of the human mind to determine the nature of the supreme good, than the declaration of Varro, that *the Heathen philosophers had embraced, within his knowledge, two hundred and eighty-eight different opinions concerning this important subject.* Nor were their sentiments concerning the nature of virtue, and the nature and means of happiness, as will be easily supposed, at all more harmonious. Some of them taught, that sensual pleasure is the chief good of man: that it consists in freedom from trouble and pain; and that business and cares do not consist with happiness; and therefore, that a man ought not to marry, because a family will give him trouble; nor engage in public business; nor meddle with the concerns of the public. They also taught, that nothing which is in itself pleasurable, is an evil; and that when it is evil, it is so, only because it brings more trouble with it than pleasure; that, therefore, injustice is not an evil in itself, but is evil merely on account of the trouble which it occasions to its author. Some of them

placed their supreme happiness in pride, and personal independence of both gods and men. Apathy, or an absolute want of feeling with respect to our own troubles, and those of our fellow-men, was regarded as being essential to this independence. Some of them placed happiness in abstraction from the world; in study; in contemplation; in quietude of mind; in indolence of body; in seclusion from human society; in wealth, power, fame, superiority of talents, and military glory. Of virtue they appear to have formed no distinct or definite conceptions. In some instances, they spoke of it with propriety and truth; but in others with such confusion, as to prove, that they were without any correct and satisfactory apprehensions concerning its nature: the several things which they taught being utterly inconsistent with each other. Different philosophers placed virtue in the love and pursuit of most of the things mentioned above, and made it consist with injustice, impurity, impiety, fraud, falsehood, the desertion of parents in their old age; unkindness to children; insensibility to the distresses of our fellow-creatures; and generally with a dereliction of almost every thing which the Scriptures have declared to be virtuous.

These observations are sufficient to shew how infinitely remote these philosophers were from just conceptions concerning this inestimable subject.

Infidels have left this important concern of man substantially as they found it. I cannot, at the present time, attempt to repeat their various doctrines. It will be sufficient to observe, at the present time, that Mr. Hume, one of the last and ablest of them, has taught us in form, that modesty, humility, repentance of sin, and the forgiveness of injuries, are vices; and that pride, therefore, impudence, resentment, revenge, and obstinacy in sin, are, by necessary consequence, virtues. This scheme needs no comment. Virtue, such as this, would lay the world waste, and render him who possessed it a fiend.

From what a glorious height do the Scriptures look down on this grovelling, deformed, self-contradictory, chaos of opinions. How sublime is the scheme, which they exhibit concerning this amazing subject! *Virtue*, they inform us, *is the love of doing good:* an active principle; the

real and whole energy of an intelligent mind, exerted for the exalted purpose of producing happiness. In the exertions of this principle, in the enjoyment which attends it, and in the happiness which it creates, the Scriptures place the supreme good of man, and of every other intelligent being. Here, and here only, is it placed with true wisdom and immoveable certainty. The mind in this manner is happy within by its self-approbation; and without, by being in the highest degree useful to others, and by receiving from the hand of others all the good, which the same usefulness in them can return to itself. Here all the provision, which is either possible or desirable, is made for enjoyment unmingled and complete. The character, the personal character, becomes glorious; the affections delightful: the conduct divine. In a community governed by this principle, every individual, however great or however small, is honourable and lovely, both in his own sight, and that of others; every one is useful also: every one is happy.

2dly. *The great practical inference from this doctrine is, that doing good is the only proper employment of man.*

You, my friends and brethren, were created for this great purpose; not to gain reputation, learning, wealth, knowledge, power, honour, or pleasure; but to do good; not to gain even heaven itself, or immortal life; but to ascend to heaven, and to acquire immortal life, that in that happy world you may employ the immense of duration in an endless diffusion of beneficence, and an endless exercise of piety and praise. Make then the end, for which God designed your existence and your faculties, the voluntary and proper end of all your wishes, designs, and labours.

With sober and affecting meditation, set it before yourselves in form and system, as the purpose for which you were made, endowed, preserved, and blessed, hitherto; as the purpose which is prescribed by the will of God; and as the purpose to which you are therefore voluntarily and supremely to devote yourselves. Let each of you say to himself, "I was formed for the great and glorious purpose of doing good. This was the will of my Maker; it is my own supreme interest; it is the interest of my fellow

creatures in *me*. Be this, then, the ultimate end of all my thoughts, wishes, and labours; and let nothing hinder me from pursuing it always. While I lawfully seek for reputation, property, learning, eloquence, power, or any other earthly good, I am resoved to seek them only in subordination to this great purpose; as means merely to this end. To form and to execute this resolution, give me grace, wisdom, and strength, O thou Father of all mercies! that I may perform thy holy will, and in some measure resemble thy perfect and glorious character, through Jesus Christ. Amen."

This solemn proposition of the subject to yourselves, would almost of course give it a distinction and importance in your view, which would induce you to keep it supremely and habitually in sight, and render it a standard, to which all your conduct would be referred for approbation or rejection; a moral scale, by which you would measure every thought and pursuit; a touchstone, by which you would distinguish every species of alloy from the most fine gold. It would also direct your aims to a higher mark; and give your efforts a noble character. Men usually, even good men, rather compound in their affections with conscience and the Scriptures, for a mixture of worldliness and virtue, than insist on observing nothing but the dictates of virtue. They aim at being virtuous; and not being only and eminently virtuous. One reason for this is, they take it for granted, that they shall never cease to sin in the present world, and therefore never mistrust either how practicable, or how important it is, that they should vigorously determine to avoid all sin, and practise nothing but virtue. Their designs are divided between their worldly business and religion. These they consider as two separate, and in a degree incoherent, objects; both necessary, but still clashing; when they ought to consider their worldly business merely as one great dictate and duty of religion; one great branch of the virtue which they are to exhibit, and of the good which they are to do. Worldly business is to be done; but it is to be done only as a part of our religion and duty. Even our amusements are always to be regarded in this manner; and are useful and lawful only as parts of our duty, and as means of enabling us better to perform

other duties of higher importance. From exact obedience to the great rule, *Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*, there is no exemption.

Were the solemn proposition which I have urged to be formed and habitually kept in sight; the character of man would soon be not sinless indeed, but incomparably more *holy, blameless, and undefiled*, than we now usually find it. Human virtue would be less clouded; would assume a brighter and more celestial aspect; and would be gilded with a clearer and more genial sunshine.

In whatever sphere of life you are placed, employ all your powers and all your means of doing good as diligently and vigorously as you can. Direct your efforts to the well-being of those who are within your reach, and not to the inhabitants of a distant age or country; of a future generation, or of China or Peru. Neglect not an humble kind office within your power, for a vast and sublime one which you cannot accomplish. The Scriptures require you to feed the hungry, and to clothe the naked; to instruct the ignorant, and reclaim the vicious. Philosophical philanthropy calls to the commiseration of nations, the overthrow of governments, the improvement of the vast society of man, and the exaltation of this wretched world to freedom, science, and happiness. The only objection to your labouring in this magnificent field seems to be, that your labours will be to no purpose. On the scriptural plan, you will at least do something; and your two mites will not be forgotten. Extend your efforts however as far as you can extend them, to any effect; to as many and as great objects as Providence places within your reach; and as many ways as you shall find in your power. Promote, as much as possible, relief, comfort, health, knowledge, virtue, and happiness, both as private and public objects. Promote them by your talents, your property, your influence, your labours, and your example. Let every day, when passing in review before the scrutinizing eye of conscience, present a regular series of beneficence, which will soften the bed of your repose, and rise as a sweet memorial before God.

As objects of your kindness, always select the most deserving. The Scriptures have directed you to *do good unto all men, and especially to those of the household of faith.* To the

soundness of this precept common sense bears, also, the fullest attestation. It was reserved for philosophy to discern, that the true and proper scenes of employing benevolence were the galley and the jail; and that its chief aim should be, not to make men good and virtuous, but to prevent thieves, murderers, and traitors, from coming to the dungeon or the gibbet, which they had merited. Let every favourable object be the honest, the industrious, the sober, the virtuous; and both feel and relieve their distresses. Refuse not others; but give to these a universal preference. When you relieve the sufferings of the vicious and infamous, close your beneficence with solemn reproof, and pungent counsel; and remember, if you withdraw them from vice to virtue, you render them a kindness, infinitely greater, than if you elevate them to wealth and honour. In this way you will save a soul from death, and cover a multitude of sins.

With all your resolutions and efforts, you will need every day assistance from God. Every day, ask it in humble, fervent prayer. No real blessing ever descends to men, but as an answer to prayer. Particularly this rich and glorious blessing of a life patiently spent in well-doing, cannot be expected unless it be asked for. Three times a day retire with Daniel to your chamber. God will be there, and will grant you a glorious answer of peace.

To such a life can you want motives? Let me remind you that *it is*, and I flatter myself, it has been proved to be, *not only the most honourable, but the only honourable, character*; the character which secures the secret approbation of those who do not assume it; and the open esteem, love, and praise, of those who do: that it is the only character which is truly and eminently happy; which possesses peace within, and enjoyment without; which is found in heaven, and constitutes the happiness of that exalted world: that it is the character of angels, of Christ, and of God; the beauty of the divine kingdom, the glory of Jehovah, and the source of all the good which is enjoyed in immensity and eternity.

It is the only character which will endure. The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he who doeth the will of God abideth for ever. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the

eyes, and the pride of life, the wretched inventory of a selfish, worldly mind, find all their poor, though boasted, gratifications on this side of the grave. Their miserable possessors riot, and dig, and climb, during their passing day; and then vanish and are seen no more: where will they next be found?

He, on the contrary, *who by patient continuance in well-doing hath sought for glory, honour, and immortality*, will lie down in the bed of peace, will *fall asleep in the* Lord Jesus, and awake with new life, and joy, and glory, beyond the grave. In the great trial he will be found, and pronounced, to have *well done*, and to have been *a good and faithful servant* of his divine Master; and will be directed to *enter into the joy of his Lord.*

In the great and final day, he will be acquitted, acknowledged, and glorified, before the assembled universe; because, when the least of Christ's brethren was *an hungered, he gave him meat; when he was thirsty, he gave him drink; when he was a stranger, he took him in; when he was naked, he clothed him; when he was sick, and in prison, he ministered unto him.* Of so high and valuable a nature will he find this beneficence, that it will be received and rewarded by Christ as done to himself. To heaven he will be an acceptable inhabitant; and meet with *an open and abundant entrance* into that happy world. Glorified saints will there hail him as their brother: angels will welcome him as their companion. There also will he find, that he has begun a career of excellence which will never end. Endued there with stronger principles and nobler powers, in a happier field, with more desirable companions, and forming all his plans of beneficence for eternal duration, he will fill up the succession of ages with a glorious and immortal progress of doing good; and become daily a brighter, a more perfect, a more divine ornament, and blessing, to the virtuous universe.

And now, my friends and brethren, *I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up in* this evangelical character, *and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.* Amen.

SERMON XCVIII.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT. THE EFFECTS OF BENEVOLENCE ON PUBLIC HAPPINESS.

I have shewed you all things, how that, so labouring, ye ought to support the weak; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.—ACTS XX. 35.

IN a preceding discourse, I considered at length, *the influence of a disposition to do good on the personal happiness of him in whom it exists;* and attempted to shew, that, *this disposition is more productive than any other of such happiness.* It is now my design to prove, that *it possesses a no less superior efficacy in producing public happiness: or the happiness of society in all its various forms.*

Of this disposition, commonly styled *disinterested benevolence,* and denoted in the New Testament by the word αγαπη, rendered in our translation *love,* and *charity,* we have an extensive, most accurate, and most beautiful, description in the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. In this chapter, it is exhibited to be superior to every natural and supernatural endowment, and to every acquisition made by man. It is proved to be the source of all good, natural and moral; or, rather, the source of all natural, and the substance of all moral, good. It is shewn to be the only real excellence of intelligent creatures; the means of their existence and their continuance in the kingdom of God; and the only cause of his complacency in their character. Finally, it is declared, that this disposition shall endure until all other things, which are admired and esteemed by men, shall be forgotten; and when they shall have ceased, together with their use and importance, shall brighten and flourish for ever.

Generally, it is declared, if I mistake not, in this chapter,

that love, in its various modifications and exercises, is the amount of all those, which are commonly called the graces of the Christian spirit; or, as they are often styled, the Christian virtues. Particularly, it is exhibited to us as long-suffering, contentment, modesty, humility, decency, disinterestedness, meekness, charitableness, hatred of iniquity, love to truth, patience, faith, hope, and fortitude. With this, the most extended and the most detailed account of the subject furnished by the Scriptures, all the other exhibitions contained in the sacred volume, perfectly agree. In them all, when connected together by the mind, as may without difficulty be perceived, this great truth is abundantly shewn; *viz.* that the love of the gospel, or the spirit of doing good, is the source of all happiness, public and private; and is productive, intentionally, of no unnecessary evil.

This truth is generally, but forcibly, taught in the text, with regard to society, as well as with regard to individuals. If we remember, that all societies are composed of individuals; we cannot hesitate to admit, that whatever renders them happy, must, in exactly the same manner and degree, be the source of public happiness. If *it is more blessed to give than to receive; if it is more blessed to cherish a spirit of doing good to others, than a disposition to gain it from them,* in individual instances; the community, in which this disposition universally reigned, could not fail to enjoy this superior happiness in its fullest extent.

Equally manifest is it, that the same disposition could not be productive of evil. *Love,* saith St. Paul, *worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* In other words, this great and glorious characteristic of love, that it is productive of no ill, rendered it an object of such excellence to the view of God, that he framed his law in such a manner, as to require nothing of his intelligent creatures, beside this attribute and its proper exercises. We are not indeed to suppose this the only reason, why the divine law was framed in this manner. The *good, of which this disposition is the parent,* was, as we are abundantly taught in the Scriptures, a commanding reason also why it was required by the law of God. To secure this good, and prevent in this manner the existence of the evil, which

would necessarily result from any other disposition, was, at the same time, supremely glorious to the infinite Lawgiver.

It cannot fail of being an interesting employment to a Christian assembly, to contemplate the operations of this spirit upon human society. In the progress of such contemplation, so many blessings will rise up to our view; and will be so easily seen to flow necessarily from this disposition; that we cannot fail to feel deeply the degraded, mischievous, miserable nature of that selfishness, which is so directly contrasted to it, and which so generally controls the affections and conduct of man. With scarcely less strength shall we realize also the excellence and amiableness of that spirit, from which good so extensively flows; which makes heaven the residence of supreme enjoyment; and which might make even this melancholy world no unworthy resemblance of heaven.

On a theme so extensive as this, and comprehending such a vast multitude of particulars, it would be easy to make many important observations. Those which fall within the compass of my design must, however, be all included within the limits of a single discourse. They will therefore be few, and of necessity general.

I. *Evangelical love, or the spirit of communicating happiness, will, of course, induce us to be contented with our own providential allotments.*

Love, saith St. Paul, *envieth not. Love seeketh not her own.*

It is easily demonstrated by reason, as well as abundantly declared in the Scriptures, that the infinitely wise and benevolent God orders all things aright. *Thus saith the* LORD, *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this; that he understandeth and knoweth me; that I am the* LORD *which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the* LORD. With such a government as this, it is evident, all persons ought to be satisfied: for all persons clearly ought to wish, that that which is righteous, wise, and benevolent, should be

invariably done. He who is dissatisfied therefore, cannot, without voluntary blindness, fail to discern, that in this temper he is guilty of sin. At the same time, the good man is taught, and will from interest and duty alike remember, that *all things work together for good to them that love God;* and therefore for good to him, as being one of this happy number. Such a man, with this conviction, must be contented of course. His understanding, prepared alway to admit the dictates of truth, and his heart, always ready to welcome them, demand and generate a contented spirit. In such a man, discontentment with his own situation, and envy on account of the superior enjoyments of others, can find no place, unless when *the law in the members, warring against the law of the mind, brings him into captivity.* Were his love therefore perfect, his contentment would be also perfect.

The importance of this disposition to the happiness of man, may be advantageously illustrated by calling up to our view the immense evils which spring from discontentment. How vast is their number; how terrible their nature! What hatred does it generate towards our fellow-creatures; what wrath; what contention; what revenge! How many slanders does it produce; how many frauds! What a multitude of perjuries, litigations, murders, and wars! What a mass of guilt does it create! What an accumulation of misery? Were the great men of this world alone to be satisfied with the wealth, splendour, and power, allotted to them; were they to thirst no more for the enjoyments bestowed on their rivals; the whole face of this earthly system would in a great measure be changed. Oppression would break his iron rod; and war would cease to ravage the habitations of men.

In producing these evils it is impossible for a mind, governed by the spirit of doing good, to take any share. Such a mind must of necessity rejoice in the righteous and benevolent dispensations of God. All these it would regard as springing from his perfect character, and as accomplishing his perfect designs. Its own allotments, therefore, it would consider as the best possible, upon the whole, for the time and the circumstances, because they were determined by this wisdom and goodness. If a man, possessed of such a

mind, were afflicted, he would *not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when he was rebuked of him;* but he would remember, that *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and* that he *scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* In this character of a son, with filial affection and reverence to *the Father of his spirit*, while thus employed in the eminently parental office of *chastening him for his good*, he would sustain his afflictions with patience, fortitude, and submission; would endeavour to derive, and would certainly derive, from them *the peaceable fruits of righteousness.* His mind would become more and more serene, patient, and enduring; more sensible of his dependance on God; more resigned to his disposal; and more intimately possessed of *fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.* Every day, and by means of every affliction, he would become more weaned from the world, more spiritually minded, less dependant for his happiness on outward objects, and more effectually sustained by the peace and joy of the gospel. In such a mind, passion would daily lose its inordinate and mischievous dominion; and reason, conscience, and piety, daily increase theirs. The views and feelings which assimilate him to an animal, would gradually lessen; and those which constitute him a rational being, continually increase. The distinction in the scale of moral existence, for which he was originally formed, he would gradually acquire; and in the end would find himself an inhabitant of heaven, fitted by a wholesome discipline for an immediate participation of its pure and unfading enjoyments.

In prosperity, the same man would acknowledge God as the giver of all his blessings. The enjoyments allotted to him he would regard, not as acquired from his Maker by bargain and sale, purchased by works which himself had wrought, and earned by his own industry and ingenuity; but as gifts descending from the Author of all good, as sovereign and merciful communications from the eternal Benefactor. To this Benefactor all his affections, prayers, and praises, would ascend; and the character which this glorious Being would sustain in the view of such a mind, would be the proper and transcendent character of JEHOVAH.

It is the lot of all men to be more or less injured by their fellow-men. In the sufferance of these injuries most men

become impatient, angry, and revengeful; and usually look no farther, while smarting under the infliction, than to the hand from which it is immediately derived. But such a mind will remember, that the injuries done by men, are also providential chastisements from God, directed by the highest wisdom, and accomplishing the most desirable purposes. However untoward, therefore, however painful, his sufferings may seem for a season, he will consider them, chiefly, as necessary parts of a perfect Providence, and as real, though mysterious means, of accomplishing perfect good. In this view they will appear comparatively light; and will be sustained with equanimity, and even with comfort. The promises of the gospel, ever present and ever fresh, will steadily furnish additional and abundant consolation. In these he will find his own good secured beyond defeat; and will *both hope, and quietly wait for, the salvation of God.* Fashioned and tempered in this manner into submission, patience, and meekness, *the work of righteousness will,* in such a mind, *be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.*

In this vast particular, therefore, extending to so many objects, spreading its influence over all the days and hours of life, man would gain, beyond measure, by assuming this divine disposition. The spirit of doing good would be in his bosom, *a well of water, flowing out unto everlasting life.* The delightful nature of benevolent affections, the animating enjoyment inherent in beneficence, would gild with sunshine the gloom of affliction, and add new beauty and splendour to seasons of prosperity. Towards God it would be exercised in the whole course of diversified obedience, particularly in complacency and gratitude, reverence and resignation; the proper efforts of a good mind to *render to him according to his benefits.* Towards man it would operate in the production of happiness, and the relief of distress, the employment of God himself, and peculiarly the source of his own infinite happiness. Thus would it unceasingly do good, and gain good: and while he, who was the subject of it, diffused enjoyment through his own bosom, he would extend it also to all around him.

It has doubtless been observed, that I have illustrated this subject hitherto, by applying it to the circumstances

of *an individual.* It is hardly necessary to remark, that what is thus true of one man, must be equally true of all others who are governed by the same spirit. This contentment, therefore, this serenity, this exquisite enjoyment, would, if such a disposition universally prevailed, be felt by a whole community, and diffused over the world. Every man would thus act; thus gain; thus enjoy. What a mass of happiness would in this manner be accumulated; and how would the darkness of this melancholy world be changed into a glorious resemblance of everlasting day!

II. *The same spirit would do justice to all men.*

Love rejoiceth not in iniquity.

Justice is either commutative or *distributive.* Commutative justice is *rendering an equivalent for what we receive, whether of property or kind offices.* Distributive justice is *the rendering of such rewards, as are due to those who obey law and government; and of such punishments, as are due to those who disobey and rebel.* In both senses, justice is the *mere measure of benevolence.* What a change would be wrought in this world by an exact fulfilment of commutative justice only! With what astonishment should we see every debt paid at the time, and in the manner, in which it was due! every promise faithfully fulfilled! every loan of money, utensils, or other property, returned without injury or delay! every commodity sold according to its real value, and that value truly declared! every character carefully and justly defended, and none unjustly attacked! every kindness gratefully felt, and exactly requited! How great a part of human corruptions would cease! How great a part of the customary litigations would be swept away! What a multitude of prosecutions would vanish! What a host of hard bargains, cheats, and jockies, would be driven from among men! How soon would the judge find himself enjoying a comparative sinecure, and the jail crumble to ruin for want of inhabitants!

But this mighty change would be still increased by the reign of distributive justice. In its laws, the legislature would regard only the good of its subjects. In his decisions, the judge, and in his administrations, the executive

magistrate, would be governed by the same great and general interest. Of course, laws would be usefully formed and equitably administered; and the public peace, approbation, and prosperity, would be uniformly secured.

To the government, the people at large would willingly render the same justice, as being influenced by the same principle. Justice, in an important sense, is due from the people to their rulers; and can be either rendered or denied. When rendered, much good, and when denied, much evil, is always done to the community. If the benevolence of the gospel governed men of all classes, this justice would be rendered cheerfully and universally. Strong in the public confidence, rulers would be at full liberty to devise and to pursue every useful measure, without danger of slander or opposition, without faction or tumult. The community would be a great and happy family, peaceful, harmonious, and safe; and, at the head of it, magistrates would be the common parents, actuated by no design, and busied in no employment, but to render themselves as useful, and the people as happy, as was in their power. How different such a nation from those that have hitherto existed in this tumultuous world!

III. *The same spirit would invariably speak truth.*

Love, saith St. Paul, *rejoiceth in the truth.*

Truth is the basis of society in all worlds where society exists. Angels could not be social without it. Thieves and robbers support their dreadful social state by speaking it to each other. To be social beings at all, we must exercise confidence. But we cannot confide where truth is not spoken. Lying, in all its forms, is the gangrene of society, and corrupts the mass just so far as it spreads. The sense of falsehood is a sense of danger, a sense of danger is distress. Suspicion, jealousy, hatred, malignant designs, and the dreadful execution of those designs, grow successively out of deception. Under the united dominion of these evils, the mind in which they exist becomes gradually a seat of woe, a haunt of dreadful passions and dreadful expectations. In the progress of intellectual nature, a world of beings thus situated would be a collection of fiends, and convert their residence into a hell. On this globe, where

much truth is spoken, and where falsehood is only mixed; where the spirit and the art of deceiving are imperfect; a great part of our sufferings, as well as of our sins, is formed by violations of truth.

What a mighty and glorious change would at once be accomplished in the circumstances of mankind, were truth to become their only and universal language! Were no false facts hereafter to be declared, no false arguments to be alleged, no false doctrines to be taught, no false pretensions to be made, no false friendships to be professed, and no false colourings to be employed, to discourage and deform truth, what a host of villains would vanish! What a multitude of impositions, treacheries, and distresses, would fade out of the picture of human woe!

To realize the nature and extent of this mighty change, cast your eyes for a moment over the face of this melancholy world. Behold all the interests of man exposed and hazarded, his peace invaded, his purposes frustrated, his business ruined, and his hopes blasted, by the various votaries of falsehood; his private affairs molested by lying servants, his friendship abused by treacherous friends, his good name dishonoured by slanderous neighbours, his learning and science perverted by philosophists, his rights and privileges wrested from him by fraudulent governments, and his salvation prevented by religious impostors. How immense is the abuse which he suffers, how comprehensive, how minute; spreading every where, and reaching to every thing which is important, which is dear to the heart! Thieves and robbers conceal and accomplish their malignant invasions of property and happiness under the darkness of midnight, and fly with terror and haste the detecting eye of day. The wretches of whom I have spoken shroud themselves in moral darkness, and equally dread the exploring beams of truth. Were this glorious light of the universe to burst the clouds which envelope our darkened world, and exhibit in clear and distinct view all things as they are, what a host of enemies, what a crowd of spectres, would fly from the dreadful detection! See the *talebearer*, hurrying from the indignant hisses of those whom he has pierced into the innermost parts of the soul! The *perjurer* shrinks from the abhorrence of those

sacred tribunals of justice, which his enormous guilt has dishonoured and defiled, and trembles at the expected infliction of that divine wrath which he has impiously invoked. The *liar* sneaks from the haunts of man, while infamy pursues his flight with her hiss of contempt, and her whip of scorpions. The *sophist* immures himself in his cell amid the foul animals, who are its proper inhabitants; while justice inscribes over the entrance, "*Here is buried the betrayer of the souls of men.*" The *seducer*, loathed, execrated, torn by a frenzied conscience, and wrung with remorse and agony, hurries out of sight to find his last refuge among his kindred fiends. Behind them, the whole train deceivers, appalled and withered, vanish from the searching beams, and sink down to the regions of darkness and despair. *The* earthly *creation*, which *has groaned and travailed in pain together until now*, under the vast miseries which these enemies of God and men have wrought, wherever they have roamed, is lightened of the insupportable burden. The gloom disappears, and universal nature smiles *to behold its redemption drawing nigh*. Tribunals of justice are purified at once. Individuals, families, and neighbourhoods, feel their wounds close, their breaches vanish, and their peace return. Religion rides in triumph through the world, and God is pleased to *dwell anew among men*.

Think not that I am too ardent in this representation. Falsehood is the first enemy of intelligent beings. The world was ruined, the human race were murdered, at first by a lie. "*The father of lies*," is the appropriate title of the worst of all beings; a title of supreme and eternal infamy, branded by the almighty hand. All the deceivers, who have followed in his train, partake of his character, are slaves, self-sold to toil in his foul and malignant drudgery, and heirs of his undying infamy and woe. *There shall in nowise enter into the city any thing that defileth, or that loveth or maketh a lie;* but, on the contrary, *all liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.*

Truth, on the other hand, is the foundation on which rests the moral universe, the stability of the divine kingdom, the light of heaven, the glory of JEHOVAH. *The truth*

is one of the peculiar names of HIM, *who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.* Truth is the great bond which unites angels to each other, and to their God; the chain which binds together the intelligent system, preserving all the parts in harmony and beauty, and arranging the worlds, of which it is composed, around the great centre of light, happiness, and glory.

IV. *From the same disposition would spring, universally, those kind offices which are its immediate offspring, and which constitute the peculiar amiableness of intelligent beings.*

Love suffereth long and is kind.

The interchanges of conduct between such beings, are in their nature and variety endless. From *inferiors to superiors,* they assume the names of our veneration, homage, respect, reverence, submission, and obedience, together with many others of the same general nature. From *superiors to inferiors,* they are in the like manner varied through all the shades of authority, government, precept, regard, countenance, favour, compassion, forgiveness, instruction, advice, reproof, and a great variety of similar offices. *Between equals,* they are performed in the more familiar, but not less necessary, acts of friendship, esteem, civility, giving, lending, aiding, and a multitude of others. These, united, constitute a vast proportion of all that excellence of which intelligent beings are capable, and of all that duty for which they are designed by their Creator. To enjoyment, *kindness* is no less necessary than *truth and justice.* Truth begins, justice regulates, and kindness finishes, rational happiness. Truth is the basis, justice the measure, and kindness the substance. All are alike, and absolutely indispensable; and of all, benevolence is the soul, the essence, the amount.

A world of kindness is a copy of heaven. A world without kindness is an image of hell. *Eden* originally derived its beauty and glory from the kind and amiable character of its inhabitants; and the verdure, the bloom, the splendour, of all its ornaments, were merely a faint resemblance of the beauty of mind, the moral life and loveliness, which glowed in our first parents. Had they preserved this

character, the world would still have continued to flourish with immortal life and beauty, and the character itself would have furnished one natural and desirable ingredient in the happiness of beings, like *them*, who by the nature of their dispositions were capable of being happy.

Were the same character to revive in the present inhabitants of the world, now in ruins around us, the bloom and beauty of Paradise would spontaneously return. Three fourths of the miseries of man are made by himself, and of these a vast proportion is formed by his unkindness. Were this malignant character banished, were sweetness and tenderness of disposition to return to the human breast, and benevolence once more to regulate human conduct, a lustre and loveliness, hitherto unknown, would be spread over the inanimate creation, and God would supply to our enjoyment all which would then be lacking.

In the exercise of this disposition, parents would be truly kind to their children, and would labour, not to gratify their pride, avarice, and sensuality, but to do them real and universal good; to form their minds to virtue and happiness, to obedience and endless life, to excellence and loveliness in the sight of God. In the *path* of this true *wisdom* they would walk before, and their offspring, following cheerfully after them, would find it to be only *pleasantness and peace*. Brothers and sisters, under this happy influence, would become brothers and sisters indeed. In their hearts, and on their tongues, would dwell *the law of kindness* to each other, and of piety to their parents. Every *son* would *make a glad father;* no daughter would be *a heaviness to her mother*. Every returning day would assume the peace and serenity of the sabbath, and every house would be converted into a little heaven.

From the house, this expansive disposition would enlarge the circuit of its benefactions so as to comprehend the neighbourhood. Happy within, every family would delight to extend its happiness to all without, who are near enough to know and to share its kind offices. The beams of charity would shine from one habitation to another; and every hamlet and village would be formed into a constellation of beauty and splendour. *Peace*, the sister of *love*, and *joy*, the third in that delightful family, would be constant visit-

ants at every fire-side; and spread their smiles and their influence over every collection of human dwellings.

To the poor, the wanderer, and the stranger, every door would be open to invite them in; every heart would welcome their entrance; and every hand to relieve their wants and distresses. The rich would be rich, only to bless; and the poor would be poor, only to be blessed. The great would employ their *ten talents* in gaining more; and the small, their *one talent* in the same honourable and profitable exchange. Kings and rulers would be, indeed, what they have been styled, but in many instances without a claim to the character, *the fathers of their country*. The *iron rod of oppression* would be finally broken, and cast away; and the golden sceptre of love, and peace, and charity, would be extended for the encouragement and relief of all who approached. Bribery, intrigue, caballing, and the whole train of public corruptors, would be hissed out of the habitations of men; and the courts of rulers become, not the scenes of guilt and mischief, but the residence of honour, dignity, and evangelical example.

Nor would this great *bond of perfectness* merely unite the members of a single community with each other; but, extending its power, like the attraction of the sun, would join all nations in one common union of peace and good-will. No more would the trumpet summon to arms; no more would the beacon kindle its fires, to spread the alarm of invasion; no more would the instruments of death *be furbished against the day of battle*. *The sword* would *be* literally *beaten into a ploughshare, and the spear into a pruning hook; nation would no more lift up sword against nation; nor kingdom against kingdom; neither would they learn war any more*. The human wolf, forgetting all his native ferocity, would cease to thirst for the blood of the lamb; and cruelty, slaughter, and desolation, to lay waste the miserable habitations of men. *The walls*, within and without which Violence resounded and ravaged, *would be called* SALVATION; and *the gates*, before which Destruction frowned at the head of an invading host, *would be surnamed* PRAISE.

V. *The same disposition would manifest itself in universal and unceasing piety to God.*

The infinite mind is the infinite benefactor of the universe. As the source and centre of all existence; as the great benefactor of all beings; as the subject of divine blessedness and excellence; God would be regarded by such a disposition with supreme benevolence and complacency. *Piety* is nothing but this disposition, directed to this great and glorious being. The *love*, which *is the fulfilling of the second* command of the moral *law*, is also perfect obedience to the *first*, which *is like unto the second*. Without love, *fear* becomes a base and pernicious passion, totally destitute of amiableness and excellency; united with love, or in a mind where love reigns, it is changed into the sublime character of *reverence*; the proper and filial regard to God from his children. *Dependance* without love is nothing. Without love, *confidence* cannot exist. *Hope* and *joy* equally spring from it. *Gratitude* is but one manner in which it is exercised.

He who loves his neighbour on any account, with the benevolence of the gospel, will, and must, of course, love his Creator. If he exercises evangelical confidence at all; he cannot but exercise it supremely in God. If he be grateful to a human benefactor; he must be beyond measure more grateful to the divine benefactor. If he love moral excellence at all, he must, more than in all other excellence, delight in that, which glows with unceasing glory in the eternal mind.

In God, therefore, this desirable disposition would find the highest object of all its attachments, the supreme end of all its conduct. To him the devotion of such a spirit would be complete, unceasing, and endless. To please, obey, and glorify him, would be the instinctive and the commanding aim of the man in whom it was found, and in the case supposed, in all men. All men would be changed into children of God. The earth would become one universal temple, from which prayer, and praise, and faith, and love, would ascend before the throne of God, and the Lamb, every morning and every evening. Time, hitherto a period of sense and sin, of impiety and rebellion, would be converted into a universal sabbath of peace and worship. *Holiness to the Lord, would be written on all the pursuits and employments of mankind. Zion, the city of our God,* would

extend its walls from the rising to the setting sun; and comprehend all the great family of Adam within its circuit, while on its gates would be inscribed, in immortal characters, JEHOVAH IS HERE.

Let me now ask, whether the love of the gospel, the spirit of doing good, is not, in the view of all who hear me, a disposition more desirable than the present disposition of man! Think what the world now is, and what since the apostacy it ever has been. Call to mind the private wretchedness, guilt, and debasement, which within and without you deform the human character, and destroy human happiness. Call to mind the public sins which have blackened the world from the beginning, and the public miseries which have rung with groans and shrieks, throughout the whole reign of time, and from one end of heaven to the other. What a vast proportion of these evils has man created for himself and his fellow-creatures! How small a proportion has God created! and how mild and proper a punishment has this been for the authors of the rest! Of this complication of guilt and woe, every man is in some degree the subject and the author. All men are daily employed in complaining of others, and none almost in reforming themselves. Were each individual to begin the task of withdrawing from the common mass the evils which he occasions, the work would be easily done. Those produced by men would be annihilated, and those occasioned by God would cease; because where there were no transgressions, God would not exercise his *strange work of punishment*.

How mighty would be the change! Benevolence would take place of malignity, friendship of contention, peace of war, truth of falsehood, and happiness of misery. This dreary world would become a paradise. The brutal deformed character of man, would give place to the holiness and dignity of angels, and all the perplexed, melancholy, and distressing scenes of time, would assume the order, beauty, and glory, of the celestial system.

With the nature and effects of the present human character, the selfishness of man, so fondly, proudly, and obstinately, cherished by every human breast, you are all, at least in some degree, acquainted. It is scarcely necessary that I should recall to your minds the universal corruption

of the *antediluvian world;* and the violence and pollution which rendered this earth too impure and deformed, to be any longer seen by the perfect eye of JEHOVAH. It is scarcely necessary to remind you of the premature apostacy which followed the deluge, the brutal idolatry which like a cloud from the bottomless pit, darkened this great globe to the four ends of heaven; the putrid infection which tainted Sodom and Gomorrah; the rank and rotten growth of sin which poisoned and destroyed the nations of Canaan; the deplorable defections of Israel and Judah; the bloody oppressions of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia; the monstrous ambition and wild ravages of Alexander; the base treacheries and deformed cruelties of *his followers;* the iron-handed plunder, butchery, and devastation of Rome; the terrible ravages of Mohammed and *his disciples;* or the fearful waste of man by Alaric, Attila, and their barbarous companions in slaughter. As little necessity is there to detail the wars and ruins of modern EUROPE: the massacres of the Romish hierarchy, the tortures of the inquisition, the absolutions and indulgences issued from the Vatican, to pardon sin, and to sanction rebellion against God. Your minds must be familiarized to the lamentable degradation, the amazing miseries, the death-like slavery, of the nations which fill the continent of Africa. You cannot be unacquainted with the swinish brutism of the Chinese; the more brutal deformity, the tiger-like thirst for blood of the Hindoos, and of *the strangers* who have successively invaded Hindostan; the fell and fiend-like cruelty that has made modern Persia a desert; the stupid, but furious superstition, and the tainted impurity of Turkey. To these monstrous corruptions, these wonderful sins of nations claiming generally the name of civilized, add the crimes of the savage world; and fasten your eyes for a moment on the wolfish rage which reigns and riots in the human animals, prowling regularly for blood and havoc around the deserts of America and Asia; and you will be presented with an imperfect, but for my purpose a sufficient exemplification of the spirit which rules the heart of man, and actuates the vast family of Adam.

But this spirit is unnecessary to man. The disposition which I have described, might just as easily inform the

mind and control the conduct. We might as easily be benevolent as selfish, virtuous as sinful. No new faculties are necessary, and no change is required, but of the disposition. How superior is the disposition here illustrated to that whose effects have been so uniformly dreadful! Hitherto I have used the language of *supposition* only, and have declared that if such were the character of our race, such also *would be* the state of this unhappy world. Now I inform you, that such one day will be the true character and state of man.

The period will one day arrive, the period is now on the wing, the day will certainly dawn: the morning star is, perhaps, even now ascending in the east of that day in which Christ will return and reign on the earth. I neither intend nor believe he will appear *in person*, until the great and final day, which the Scriptures emphatically call *his second coming:* for *the heavens must receive him until the time of the restitution of all things.* But he will appear in his providence and by his *Spirit*, to *renew the face of the earth. A new heart and a right spirit* will *he create within them. His law he will write in their hearts, and his fear will he put in their minds, and their sins and their iniquities will he remember no more.* This new heart, this right spirit, will be no other than the disposition which has been here considered; the very obedience of the law which will be thus written; the new creation which is thus promised.

By the implantation of this holy character in the soul, a change will be accomplished, which is exhibited in the Scriptures in terms of hyperbolical and singular sublimity. In their *present state of apostacy*, mankind are considered in this sacred volume as being all buried in a death-like sleep. From this benumbing lethargy, hopeless and endless, unless removed by almighty power, they are represented as roused anew to consciousness, to feeling, and to action, by the awakening voice of God. In the present state they are declared to be madmen, groping in the gloom, wantoning in the excesses, and venting the rage, of Bedlam. In the new one they are exhibited as restored to reason, to sobriety, to intellectual dignity and usefulness, and as introduced again to the society, converse, and esteem, of rational beings. Originally, they are pri-

soners to sin and Satan, the victims of turpitude, and the sport of fiends; yet they are *prisoners of hope*. In their renovation they have heard *liberty proclaimed to the captive, and the opening of the prison-doors to them that are bound;* and at the sound of these glad tidings they have shaken off their chains, and escaped from their dungeon into *the glorious liberty of the sons of God*. In their present state they are pronounced to be dead, and fallen together in one great valley of the shadow of death, the appointed and immense receptacle of departed men, where their bones are dispersed over the waste; dried, whitened, and returning to their original dust. A voice from heaven resounding through the regions of this immense catacomb, commands the scattered fragments to assemble from the four corners of heaven, to reunite in their proper places, and to constitute anew the forms of men. A noise, a shaking, a rustling, is heard over the vast GOLGOTHA, a general commotion begins, and moved by an instinctive power, bone seeks its kindred bone; the sinews and flesh spontaneously arise and cover the naked form, and the spirit of life breathes with one divine and universal energy on the unnumbered multitude. Inspired thus with breath and life, the great host of mankind instinctively rise and stand on their feet, and live again with immortal life. The great world of death is filled with animated beings; and throughout its amazing regions, those who were *dead* are *alive again*, and those who were *lost* to the creation *are found*.

This resurrection is no other than a resurrection to spiritual life, no other than an assumption of this new and heavenly character. This character, this disposition, will constitute the sum and the glory of the millennial state, and the foundation of all its blessings. *When the heavens shall drop down dew from above, the skies pour down righteousness, and the earth open and bring forth salvation;* all the external good, all the splendour and distinction of that happy period, will follow as things of course; as consequences which in the divine system virtue draws in its train. *The Lord of hosts will* therefore *make for all nations a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees well refined. The Lord of hosts will swallow up death in victory, and will wipe away the tears from all faces, and will*

take away the reproach of his people from all the earth. He will lay the stones of Zion with fair colours, and her foundations with sapphires; will make her windows of agates, her gates of carbuncles, and all her borders of pleasant stones. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

SERMON XCIX.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT. UTILITY THE FOUNDATION OF VIRTUE.

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.—ACTS xx. 35.

IN my two last discourses, I endeavoured to shew by a variety of arguments, that a disposition voluntarily employed in doing good, is productive of a more personal and public happiness than any other can be. In those discourses, and in several preceding ones, it has, if I mistake not, been sufficiently proved, that the same disposition in the Creator and his intelligent creatures, is the source not only of more happiness to the creation at large than any other, but of all the happiness which has existed, or will ever exist.

Virtue, or moral excellence, is an object of such high import, as to have engaged, in every enlightened country and period, the deepest attention of mankind. It has of course been the subject of the most laborious investigations, and of very numerous discussions. Inquisitive men have asked, with no small anxiety, "What is virtue?" "What is its nature?" "What is its excellence?" and "What is the

foundation on which this excellence rests?" To those questions widely different and directly opposite answers have been given. In modern times, and in this as well as other countries, much debate has existed concerning *the foundation of virtue.* It has been said to be founded in *the nature of things; in the reason of things; in the fitness of things; in the will of God;* and *in utility.* My intention in this discourse is to examine *the nature of this subject.*

The phrase, *the foundation of virtue,* has been very differently understood by different writers. Indeed, the word *foundation,* in this case, seems to be a defective one; as being ambiguous; and therefore exposed to different interpretations. When virtue is said *to be founded on the will of God, or in utility,* some writers appear to intend by this phraseology, that *the will of God or utility* is the *rule, measure,* or *directory, of virtuous conduct.* Others evidently intend, *that one or the other of these things is what constitutes virtue; makes it valuable, excellent, lovely, praiseworthy, and rewardable.* It is therefore absolutely necessary for me to observe, antecedently to entering on this discussion, that *I use the phrase in the sense last mentioned; and intend by the foundation of virtue that which constitutes its value and excellence.* It is necessary also, to premise farther, *that by the word utility,* I mean *a tendency to produce happiness.*

Having premised these things, I shall endeavour, in the following discourse, to support this doctrine; THAT VIRTUE IS FOUNDED IN UTILITY.

The text is a general and indirect declaration of this doctrine. The word *blessed,* is sometimes used to denote a state happy in itself; and sometimes a state made happy, or blessed by God. *To give,* in the sense of the text, *is voluntarily to communicate happiness;* or, in other words, *to be voluntarily useful.* As we are in fact made happy by God, whenever we are happy; it is evident, that those moral beings who are most happy, being made by him as a reward of their character and conduct, and not merely by the nature of that character and conduct, are most approved by him. That which is most approved by God, is in itself most excellent. But the text informs us that voluntary usefulness is most approved by God, because it is peculi-

arly blessed by him; and is therefore the highest excellence. A man may be virtuous in *receiving good* at the hands of his fellow-creatures. But his virtue will consist only in the disposition with which he receives it: his gratitude; his desire to glorify God; and his wishes to requite, whenever it shall be in his power, his created benefactors. This is being useful in the only way which the situation here supposed allows; and the only thing which is virtuous or excellent in the mere state of *receiving good.*

To give, or communicate good, is a nobler and more excellent state of being, than that of receiving good can be; because the giver is voluntarily the originator of happiness. In this conduct he resembles God himself, the giver of all good, in that characteristic which is the peculiar excellence and glory of his nature. Accordingly God loves, and for this reason blesses, him, in a pre-eminent degree. The proof of his superior excellence is complete in the fact, that he is peculiarly blessed: for these peculiar blessings which he receives, are indubitable evidence of the peculiar favour of God; and the peculiar favour of God is equal evidence of peculiar excellence in him who is thus blessed. But the only excellence here alleged, or supposed by Christ, is the spirit of doing good; or, in other words, the spirit of voluntary usefulness. In this spirit then, virtue or moral excellence consists; and the only excellence here supposed, is of course founded in utility.

To the evidence furnished by the text, both reason and revelation add ample confirmation. This I trust will sufficiently appear in the course of the following observations.

1st. *Virtue is not founded in the will of God.*

Those who hold the doctrine which I have here denied, may have been led unwittingly to adopt it from an apprehension, *that they could not ascribe too much to God.* This apprehension is, without doubt, generally just; yet it is not just in the absolute sense. There is neither irreverence nor mistake in saying, that omnipotence cannot create that which will be self-contradictory; make two and two five; nor recall the existence of a past event; because these things would be impossible in their own nature. In the

same manner, to ascribe to God that which is not done by him, though the ascription may flow from reverence to his character, is not yet dictated by reverence. That which God in fact does, is more honourable to him than any thing else can be; and no error can in its nature be reverential towards God, or required by him of his creatures.

The doctrine *that virtue is founded in the will of God*, supposes, that *that, which is now virtue, became such, became excellent, valuable, praiseworthy, and rewardable, because God willed it to be so; and had he not willed it to be so, it would not have been virtue.* Of course, if we were to suppose intelligent beings created, and left without any law to choose their conduct; or, if we were to suppose the universe to exist just as it now exists, and exist thus either by chance or necessity; that which is now virtuous, excellent, and praiseworthy, would at the utmost possess a nature merely indifferent; and, although all other things remained just as they now are, would cease to be excellent, lovely, and deserving of approbation. According to the same scheme also, that which is now sinful, or vicious, would cease to be of this nature; and no longer merit hatred, blame, or punishment. In plainer language, veracity and lying, honesty and fraud, justice and oppression, kindness and cruelty, although exactly the same things which they now are, and although producing exactly the same effects, would no more possess their present opposite moral character; but would equally deserve our love and approbation, or our hatred and disesteem. If virtue and vice are such, only because God willed them to be such; if virtue is excellent, and vice worthless, only because he willed them to be so; then vice in itself is just as excellent as virtue, and virtue just as worthless as vice. Let me ask, can any man believe this to be true?

Farther, the supposition that virtue is founded in the will of God, implies, that God willed virtue to be excellent without any reason. If virtue and vice had originally, or as they were seen by the eye of God, no moral difference in their nature; then there was plainly no reason why God should prefer, or why he actually preferred, one of them to the other. There was, for example, no reason why he

chose and required that intelligent creatures should love *him*, and *each other*, rather than that they should hate him, and hate each other. In choosing and requiring that they should exercise this love, God acted therefore without any motive whatever. Certainly, no sober man will attribute this conduct to God.

This supposition, also, is inconsistent with the *omniscience of God*. Every thing which exists, or which will ever exist, was, antecedently to its existence, or, in other words, eternally and immutably present to the divine mind. In the same manner, all other possible things, that is, things which God could have created if he had pleased, were also present to his view. Every man knows, that a vast multitude of such things are successively present to his own imagination; and that he can think of new worlds, new beings to inhabit them, and new furniture to replenish them. But, unquestionably, God knows all things which are known by his creatures, and infinitely more. When created things were thus present to his eye, antecedently to their existence, they were exactly the same things in his view, which they afterward were when they began to exist; had exactly the same natures; sustained exactly the same relations; and were just as good, indifferent, or evil, just as excellent or worthless, as amiable or hateful, as commendable or blameworthy, as rewardable or punishable, as they afterward were in fact. This may be illustrated by a familiar example. Most persons have read more or less of those fictitious histories which are called novels; and every person knows, that the several actors exhibited in them never had any real existence. Yet every one knows equally well, that the characters which they severally sustain, are as really good or evil, lovely or hateful, praiseworthy or blamable, as the same characters of the same persons would be, had they all been living men and women. It is therefore unanswerably evident, that moral characters, when merely seen in contemplation, are, independently of their actual existence in living beings, and therefore before they have existed in such beings, as well as when they never exist at all in this manner, good or evil to the eye of the mind. Of course, they are good or evil in their own nature. Of course, they were seen to be

good or evil by the omniscience of God. It is therefore inconsistent with the doctrine, that God is omniscient, to say, that virtue is founded in the will of God.

Again; The scheme which I am controverting, not only involves in it, that mankind, with all their impiety, injustice, cruelty, oppression, wars, and butcheries, are in their nature equally amiable and excellent as angels, with all their truth and benevolence; but also, that the character of fiends is in itself, and independently of the fact, that God chose it should be otherwise, just as lovely, excellent, and praiseworthy, as that of angels. If then God had willed the character which Satan adopted and sustains to be moral excellence, and that which Gabriel sustains to be moral worthlessness; these two beings, continuing in every other respect the same, would have interchanged their characters. Satan would have become entirely lovely, and Gabriel entirely detestable. Must not he who can believe this doctrine, as easily believe, that if God had willed it, two and two would have become five? Is it at all easier to believe, that truth and falsehood can interchange their natures, than that a square and a circle can interchange theirs?

Finally; If virtue and vice, or sin and holiness, are founded only in the will of God; then I ask, What is the nature of that will? We are accustomed to say, the Scriptures are accustomed to say, that God is holy, righteous, good, and *glorious in holiness:* expressions which, together with many others of the same nature, indicate that God himself, and therefore that the will of God, is excellent, and supremely deserving of his own infinite love, and of the highest love of all intelligent creatures. Does this excellence of God depend on the fact that he willed his moral character, and therefore his will, to be excellent? Or is the character of God, and of consequence his will, excellent in its own nature? If the divine character be not excellent in its own nature, and independently of any act of the divine will determining that it should be so; then, if God had been a being equally malevolent, and by an act of his will had determined that his character should be infinitely excellent, it would of course have become infinitely excellent; and he himself would have deserved to be loved, praised, and glorified, for his infinite malice, cruelty, and

oppression, just as he now does for his infinite goodness, truth, faithfulness, and mercy. According to this scheme, therefore, there is no original moral difference between the characters of an infinitely malevolent being, and an infinitely benevolent one; because this difference depends on a mere arbitrary act of will, and not at all on the respective natures of the things themselves. That a malevolent being would have made this determination, there is no more reason to doubt, than that it would be made by a benevolent being; for it cannot be doubted, that a malevolent being would have entirely loved and honoured himself. The question, whether God is a benevolent or malevolent being, seems therefore to be nugatory; for all our inquiries concerning the subject, which have any practical importance, terminate in this single question;—What has God chosen?

We have of course no interest in asking what is his moral nature.

The Scriptures certainly exhibit this subject in a very different light. They every where consider moral things, that is, both moral beings and their actions, as differing altogether in their several natures, and independently of any act of the divine will, determining that they should thus differ. Particularly, they exhibit God himself not only as being holy, righteous, just, true, faithful, kind, and merciful, but as excellent on account of these things; infinitely excellent; infinitely glorious; infinitely deserving of the love, that is, the complacency (the kind of love every where intended in this discourse), of his intelligent creatures. Accordingly, God is often spoken of as excellent; and as *excellency in the abstract*. Thus, he is styled *the excellency of Jacob*. *His name* is said *to be excellent in all the earth*. *How excellent*, saith the Psalmist, *is thy loving-kindness*. *The Lord of hosts*, says Isaiah, *is excellent in working*. In all these passages it is plainly declared, that God is excellent in his own nature. In the same manner, the Scriptures assert, *that his law is perfect*, and *his commandment pure*; that *his statutes are right*, and *his judgments altogether righteous*; and that *his commandment is holy, just, and good*: that is, that these things possess the several kinds of excellence attributed to them in their

own nature. For if the Scriptures intended only, that they were good because God willed them to be so, when they were before neither good nor evil, it would have been mere tautology to have used this language. It would have been no more than saying, that *the law, the commandments,* and *the statutes,* of God were *his* law, commandments, and statutes: this fact being, according to the scheme here opposed, all *that* in which their excellence lies. In the same manner, when it is said, *Thou art good, and doest good;* it ought to be said, *Thou art what thou art, and doest what thou doest,* for this is all that is meant, according to the scheme in question.

In the same manner, the Scriptures declare, that *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness;* and thus teach us, that there is in righteousness a cause, a reason, or, in other words, a nature, for which it is, and deserves to be, loved. They also assure us, that *he hates wickedness, and that it is an abomination to him.* There is, therefore, a reason why he hates it. As he always hated the latter, and loved the former; and, therefore, before the one was forbidden, and the other required, of his intelligent creatures; it is certain that the one was hateful, and the other lovely, in its own nature.

In Jer. ix. 24, it is said, *Let him that glorieth glory in this; that he understandeth, and knoweth me; that I am the* LORD, *which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the* LORD. In this passage God requires mankind to glory, not merely because he acts, but because he acts in such a manner; because he *exercises loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth;* and informs us, that he himself *delights in these things:* in other words, because they are lovely in his sight.

In Hebrews vi. 18, it is said, that *it is impossible for God to lie.* If at any given time it is impossible for God to lie, it has been always impossible. For what reason? If truth and falsehood are in their own nature indifferent; then certainly it was once just as easy for God to lie, as to speak truth. The only reason why it is now impossible for him to utter falsehood, is, that he is utterly indisposed to this conduct. But if falsehood and truth have the same moral

nature in themselves; there can be no reason why he was originally disposed to speak truth rather than falsehood. Yet he is infinitely disposed to speak truth, and infinitely indisposed to utter falsehood. Falsehood is therefore totally odious in itself, and truth altogether desirable.

Every thing contained in the Scriptures relative to this subject is of the same tenor, so far as I have been able to understand them, with the passages which I have quoted. Nor have I found in them a single hint, that virtue and vice have not in themselves a totally different moral nature; or that they depend for their excellence and worthlessness on an act of the divine will. On the contrary, the whole drift of the Scriptures is to exhibit them as possessed of these characteristics in themselves; and as, for this reason, chosen and required on the one hand, and rejected and forbidden on the other.

There are persons who speak of the will of God as constituting the nature of things, when they only mean that it gives them existence. These persons appear not to discern that the nature of the thing is exactly the same, whether it exists, or is only seen in contemplation. The Achilles of Homer, the Æneas of Virgil, the Lear of Shakspeare, and the Grandison of Richardson, have all the same character, which real men, answering severally to the descriptions of them, would possess. The will of God gives birth to the existence of all things. But the things themselves, as seen by the divine mind, have exactly the same nature, and sustain the same relations to each other; have the same value or worthlessness, the same excellence or turpitude; which they have when they really exist. This nature is what makes them desirable, or undesirable, to the eye of God; and induces him either to choose or reject them. While it is true, therefore, that the will of God gives birth to all things, and to their several natures, as really existing in act; it is equally true, that, as seen by the divine mind, the same things had exactly the same nature before they existed. A house, before it is built, and when formed merely in a plan, has exactly the same figure and proportions, as seen by the mind of the builder, which it has after it is built according to this plan. Truth and falsehood, right and wrong, in creatures, were exactly the same

things to the eye of Omniscience, before and after they existed.

From these considerations, it is, I apprehend, evident, that *the foundation of virtue is not in the will of God, but in the nature of things.* The next object of inquiry, therefore, is, *Where in the nature of things shall we find this foundation?* I begin my answer to this question by observing,—

2dly. *That there is no ultimate good but happiness.*

By *ultimate good* I intend *that, which is originally denominated good.* Good is of two kinds only: happiness, and the causes or means of happiness. Happiness is the ultimate good: the causes or means of happiness are good, only because they produce it. Thus fruit is good, because it is pleasant to the taste. The tree on which it grows is good, because it produces it. Health is good in itself; a medicine is good, because it preserves or restores it.

We are accustomed to hear so much said, and truly said, concerning the excellence, beauty, and glory, of virtue, that we are ready to conceive and speak of it as being original or ultimate good, independently of the happiness which it brings with it. Nay, we are ready to feel dissatisfied with ourselves and others for calling this position in question; to consider this conduct as involving a kind of irreverence towards this glorious object; as diminishing its importance, and obscuring its lustre. This, however, arises from mere misapprehension. If virtue brought with it no enjoyment to us, and produced no happiness to others; it would be wholly destitute of all the importance, beauty, and glory, with which it is now invested. Let any good man ask himself what that is for which he values his own virtue; what constitutes the commendations of it in the conversation and writings, particularly the sermons, with which he is acquainted; and what is the amount of all that for which it is commended in the Scriptures; and he will find every idea which he forms of it, distinctly and definitely, completely summed up in these two things; that *it is the means of glory to God, and of good to his creatures.* I have shewn in a former discourse, that to glorify God, that is, voluntarily (the thing which is here intended), is exactly the same

conduct towards him, which, when directed towards creatures, produces their happiness. It is, in truth, doing all that, which it is in our power to do, towards the happiness of the Creator. The happiness of God consists in the enjoyment, furnished partly by his sufficiency for all great and glorious purposes, and partly by the actual accomplishment of these purposes. I separate these things only for the sake of exhibiting them more distinctly to view; and am well aware, that, as they exist in the divine mind, they are absolutely inseparable. *The Lord*, saith the Psalmist, *shall rejoice in his works*. Had these works never existed, God would not thus rejoice. *God* is also said *to delight in the upright;* and *to delight in his church*. Were there no upright persons, were there no church, this delight would cease. It is therefore true in the proper sense, that virtuous persons, by voluntarily glorifying God, become the objects of his delight; or, in other words, the means of happiness or enjoyment to him. It will not be supposed that God is for this reason dependant on his creatures for his happiness, or for any part of it. These very creatures are absolutely dependant on him; and are made by himself the objects of his delight; and such they become by the same voluntary conduct, which in other cases produces happiness in creatures. When we consider virtue as it respects creatures only, the character which I have given to it, is more easily seen and more readily comprehended. It may easily be seen, in this case, that all its value consists in the enjoyment which either attends or follows it. All the *exercises* of virtue are delightful in themselves. It is delightful to do good to others; to see them happy, and made happy by our means; to enjoy peace of conscience, and self-approbation. These and the like enjoyments may be said *to attend virtue;* and, it is well known, enter largely into every account which is given of its excellence. *The consequences* of virtue are no other than the good which it produces in originating and increasing social happiness; and these, together with the articles involved in the two preceding considerations, make up the whole amount of all the commendations of this divine object, given either by the Scriptures, or by mankind. The excellence of vir-

tue, therefore, consists wholly in this; that it is *the cause of good*, that is, *of happiness:* the ultimate good; the only thing for which virtue is valuable.

Virtue of God, or benevolence, is on all hands considered as the glory and excellency of the divine character. What is benevolence? The love of doing good; or a disposition to produce happiness. In what does its excellence consist? In this; that it is the voluntary cause of happiness. Take away this single attribute of virtue; and it will be easily seen, that its excellence is all taken away also.

These observations prove, if I mistake not, that happiness is the only ultimate good; and that virtue is termed good, only as being the cause of happiness.

3dly. *Virtue is the only original cause of happiness.*

It is hardly necessary to say, that *involuntary beings* can of themselves produce nothing; as being absolutely inactive; and that there are no *active beings* beside those which are *voluntary*. But voluntary beings produce happiness only when they are disposed to produce it: and the only disposition which prompts to the production of it is virtue. This is so obvious, after what has been said, as to need no farther illustration.

Contrivance and activity are the original sources of all the effects or changes which take place in the universe; particularly of all the happiness which it contains. Contrivance and activity in the Creator gave birth to all existence except his own. Contrivance and activity in intelligent creatures, under God, give birth to all the happiness of which they are the sources to themselves and each other.

Minds are active only by means of the power of willing. The two great dispositions of minds by which all their volitions are characterized and directed, are benevolence and selfishness. Benevolence is virtue; selfishness is sin. Benevolence aims to promote happiness in all beings capable of happiness: selfishness as the promotion of the private, separate happiness *of one;* subordinating to it that *of all others*, and opposing that of others, whenever it is considered as inconsistent with that of one's self. *Benevolence, therefore, directs the whole active power or energy of the*

mind in which it exists, to the production of the most extensive happiness. This is what I intend by *the utility of virtue;* and that in which, as it appears to my own view, all its excellence is found. Sin is naturally and necessarily the parent of misery; since it arms every individual against the interest of every other.

Were sin in its own proper tendency to produce invariably the same good which it is the tendency of virtue to produce; were it the means invariably, of the same glory to God, and of the same enjoyment to the universe; no reason is apparent to me, why it would not become excellent, commendable, and rewardable, in the same manner as virtue now is. Were virtue regularly to effectuate the same dishonour to God, and the same misery to intelligent creatures, now effectuated by sin; I see no reason, why we should not attribute to it all the odiousness, blameworthiness, and desert of punishment, which we now attribute to sin. All this is, I confess, impossible; and is rendered so by the nature of these things. Still the supposition may be allowably made for the purposes of discussion.

The great objection to this doctrine arises from a misapprehension of the subject. It is this; that *if virtue is founded in utility, then utility becomes the measure of virtue, and of course the rule of all our moral conduct.* This is the error of Godwin; and in an indefinite degree, of Paley and several other writers. Were we omniscient, and able to discern the true nature of all the effects of our conduct; this consequence must undoubtedly be admitted. To the eye of God it is the real rule. It will not, I trust, be denied, that he has chosen, and required, that to be done by his intelligent creatures, which is most useful; or, in other words, most productive of good to the universe, and of glory to himself; rather than that which is less so. But to us, utility, as judged of by ourselves, cannot be a proper rule of moral conduct. *The real usefulness of our conduct, or its usefulness upon the whole, lies in the nature of all its effects, considered as one aggregate.* But nothing is more evident, than that few, very few indeed of these, can ever be known to us by our own foresight. If the information given us by the Scriptures concerning this subject were to be lost; we should be surprised to see how small was the number of

cases, in which this knowledge was attainable, even in a moderate degree; and how much uncertainty attended even these. As therefore we are unable to discern with truth or probability the real usefulness of our conduct; it is impossible, that our moral actions should be safely guided by this rule.

The Bible is, with the plainest evidence, the only safe rule by which moral beings can in this world direct their conduct. The precepts of this sacred volume were all formed by him, who alone *sees the end from the beginning*, and who alone therefore understands the real nature of all moral actions. No other being is able to determine how far any action is, upon the whole, useful or noxious; or to make utility the measure of virtue. As well might a man determine, that a path, whose direction he can discern only for a furlong, will conduct him in a straight course to a city, distant from him a thousand miles, as to determine that an action, whose immediate tendency he perceives to be useful, will therefore be useful through a thousand years, or even through ten. How much less able must he be to perceive what will be its real tendency in the remote ages of endless duration. It is impossible therefore, that utility, as decided by our judgment, should become the rule of moral action.

It has also been objected to this doctrine, that if virtue is founded in utility, *every thing which is useful, must so far be virtuous.* This objection it is hardly necessary to answer. Voluntary usefulness is the only virtue. A smatterer in moral philosophy knows, that understanding and will are necessary to the existence of virtue. He who informs us, that, if virtue is founded in utility, animals, vegetables, and minerals, the sun, and the moon, and the stars, must be virtuous, so far as they are useful, is either disposed to trifle with mankind for his amusement, or supposes them to be triflers.

REMARKS.

1st. *From these observations we learn, in an interesting manner, the desirableness of virtue.*

The whole tendency of virtue is to promote happiness; and this is its only ultimate tendency. It prefers of course

the greater happiness to the less, and the greatest always to that which can exist in a subordinate degree. It diffuses happiness every where, and to every being capable of receiving it, so far as this diffusion is in its power. In this respect it knows no distinction of family, country, or world; and operates to the benefit of those who are near, more than to that of those who are distant, only because its operations will be more effectual, and because, when all pursue this course, the greatest good will be done to all. Its efficacy also is complete. The object at which it aims, it can accomplish. It can contrive, it can direct, it can effectuate. To do good is its *happiness*, as well as its *tendency*. It will therefore never be inattentive, never discouraged, never disposed to relax its efforts. Thus it is a perennial spring, whose waters never fail; a spring at which thousands and millions may slake their thirst for enjoyment, and of which the streams are always pure, healthful, and refreshing.

2dly. *We learn from the same observations the odious nature of sin.*

Sin, or selfishness, aiming supremely at the private, separate good of an individual, and subordinating to it the good of all others, confines its efforts of course to the narrow sphere of one's self. All the individuals also in whom this spirit prevails, have each a personal good, to which each subordinates every other good. There are, therefore, as many separate interests in a collection of selfish beings, as there are individuals; and to each of these interests the individual, whose it is, intends to make those of all others subservient. Of consequence, these interests cannot fail to clash; and the individuals to oppose and contend with each other. Hence an unceasing course of hatred, wrath, revenge, and violence, must prevail among beings of this character; of private quarrels, and public wars. All who oppose this darling interest, are regarded by the individual as his enemies: and thus all naturally become the enemies of all. Where this disposition is in a great measure unrestrained, it makes an individual a tyrant, and a society a collection of banditti. Where it is wholly unrestrained, it converts intelligent beings into fiends, and their habitation into hell.

The ruling principle here, is *to gain good from others*, and *not to communicate it to them*. This darling spirit, so cherished by mankind, so active in the present world, so indulged, flattered, and boasted of, by those who possess it, is, instead of being wise and profitable, plainly foolish, shameful, ruinous, and deserving of the most intense reprobation. Notwithstanding all the restraints, laid upon it by the good providence of God; notwithstanding the shortness of life, which prevents us from forming permanent plans, making great acquisitions to ourselves, and producing great mischiefs to others; notwithstanding the weakness, frailty, and fear, which continually attend us; notwithstanding the efficacy of natural affection, the power of conscience, and the benevolent influence of religion on the affairs of mankind; it makes the present world an uncomfortable and melancholy residence; and creates three-fourths of the misery suffered by the race of Adam.

All these evils exist, because men are disinclined to do good, or to be voluntarily useful. Were they only disposed to promote each other's happiness, or, in other words, to be useful to each other; the world would become a pleasant and desirable habitation. The calamities immediately brought upon us by Providence, would be found to be few; those induced by men upon themselves and each other would vanish, and in their place beneficence would spread its innumerable blessings.

3dly. *These observations strongly exhibit to us the miserable state of the world of perdition.*

In this melancholy region no good is done, nor intended to be done. No good is therefore enjoyed. Still the mind retains its original activity, and *is wise* and vigorous *to do good*. Here, all the passions of a selfish spirit are let loose; and riot, and reign, and ravage. Here, therefore, all are enemies. Here the wretched individual, surveying the vast regions around him, and casting his eyes forward into the immeasurable progress of eternity, sees himself absolutely alone in the midst of millions, in solitude complete and endless. Here, voluntary usefulness is for ever unknown and unheard of; while selfishness, in all its dreadful

forms, assumes an undisputed, an unresisted dominion, a terrible despotism; and fills the world around her with rage and wretchedness, with terror and doubt, with desolation and despair.

4thly. *How delightful a view do these observations give of heaven!*

Heaven is the world of voluntary usefulness. The only disposition of angels, and *the spirits of just men made perfect,* is to do good; their only employment to produce happiness. In this employment all the energy of sanctified and perfect minds is exerted without weariness, and without end. How vast then, how incomprehensible, how endlessly increasing, must be the mass of happiness brought by their united efforts into being! How ample a provision must it be for all the continually expanding wishes, the continually enlarging capacities of its glorious inhabitants! How wonderfully also must the sum of enjoyment be enhanced to each, when we remember that he will experience the same delight in the good enjoyed by others, as in that which is immediately his own! Who would not labour to gain an entrance into such a world as this? Who would not bend all his efforts, exhaust all his powers, encounter any earthly suffering, and resolutely overcome every earthly obstacle, to acquire that divine and delightful character of voluntary usefulness, which makes heaven such a world; which makes it the place of God's peculiar presence, the means of his highest glory, and the mansion of everlasting life, peace and joy to his children?

SERMON C.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE DECALOGUE. THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.—EXOD. xx. 3.

IN the series of discourses which I have lately delivered concerning the two great commands of the moral law, it has, if I mistake not, been sufficiently shewn, that the disposition required by the Creator of his intelligent creatures in this law, is *disinterested love*, or *the spirit of doing good*. The *tendency* of this disposition is always to do what is right. It will not, however, follow, that the mind in which it exists, will be able always to discern the course of conduct, which it ought upon the whole to pursue. The disposition may, with absolute correctness, dictate what is absolutely proper to be done in a case already before the view of the mind; and yet the mind be wholly ignorant, whether that case or the conduct in question is such as would upon the whole be best for it to pursue; or whether superior wisdom would not be able to devise for it other and much more desirable courses of action. A child may be perfectly holy; and yet possess too little understanding to know in what way he may best act, in what way he may most promote the glory of God, the good of his fellow-creatures, or the good of himself. His disposition may prompt to that, which is exactly right in all the conduct which is within the reach of his understanding. Yet, if he had more comprehensive views, he might discern far more desirable modes of action, in which he might be much more useful than in any which he is at present able to devise. He may be able to apply the two great commands of the moral law, which have been so extensively considered, with exact propriety to all such cases as are actually within his view; and yet be utterly unable to devise for himself those kinds

of conduct in which his obedience to these commands might be most profitably employed.

What is true of a child is true, in different degrees, of all intelligent creatures. God only, as was shewn in a former discourse, is able to discern and to prescribe the conduct, which upon the whole it is proper for such creatures to pursue. He *sees from the beginning to the end;* and perfectly understands the nature and the consequences of all intelligent action. This knowledge, which he alone possesses, and which is indispensable to this purpose, enables him to accomplish it in a manner absolutely perfect.

What is true in this respect, of intelligent creatures universally, is peculiarly true of *sinful creatures.* The *disposition* of sinners leads them of course to that conduct which is wrong and mischievous. They are, therefore, always in danger of erring from *mere disposition.* Besides, sin renders the mind *voluntarily ignorant,* and in this manner also exposes it continually to error. A great part of all the false opinions entertained by mankind concerning their duty, are to be attributed solely to the biasses of a sinful disposition. None are so blind, none so erroneous, as those who are unwilling to see.

From a merciful regard to these circumstances, particularly of mankind, God has been pleased to reveal to them his pleasure, and their duty; to disclose to them all those modes of moral action, all those kinds of moral conduct, in which they may most promote his glory, and their own good. The importance of this revelation is evidenced in the strongest manner, by the moral situation of that part of the human race to whom it has never been published. I need not inform you, that they have been wholly ignorant of the true God, and of a great part of the principles and precepts of the moral system; that they have worshipped men, animals, evil spirits, and gods of gold and silver, of wood and stone. I need not inform you, that they have violated every moral precept, and every dictate of natural affection. I need not inform you, that without revelation we should have been heathen also; and should, in all probability, have been this day prostrating ourselves before an ox or an ape, or passing children through the fire unto Moloch.

Among the several parts of the revelation which has raised our moral condition so greatly above that of the heathen, *the decalogue* is eminently distinguished. The decalogue is a larger summary of our duty, than that which is contained in the two great commands already considered. The same things in substance are required in it; but they are branched out into various important particulars; all of them supremely necessary to be known by *us*. To enforce their importance on our minds, God was pleased to utter the several precepts, contained in this summary, with his own voice; and to write them with his own finger on two tables of stone, fashioned by himself. They were published, also, amid the thunderings and lightnings of Mount Sinai, from the bosom of the cloud by which it was enveloped, and out of the flame which ascended from its summit.

The four first of the commands, contained in the decalogue, regulate our immediate duty to God; the six last, our duty to men. The former were written on *one*, properly called the *first* table; the latter on *another*, usually styled the *second* table.

Two of these commands, one of the first and one of the second table, are *positive*, that is, *direct, injunctions of our duty:* the remaining eight are *negative* or *prohibitory*. Both classes however are of exactly the same extent: those which are positive, forbidding the conduct which is contrary to what they enjoin; and those which are negative, requiring that which is contrary to what they forbid.

The first of these commands is *the text*. The duty enjoined in it, is of such a nature, that, to a mind governed by the dictates of reason, an express injunction of it would seem in a great measure unnecessary, if not altogether superfluous. So vast is the difference between the real God, and every possible substitute, that sober contemplation would scarcely suspect it to be possible for a man, who was not bereft of reason, to put any other being into his place, even under the influence of the most wandering fancy. How unlike all other beings must he evidently be, who made the heavens and the earth; whose breath kindled the sun and the stars; and whose hand rolls the planets through im-

mensity! How infinitely superior does he obviously appear to every thing which he has made; and how infinitely remote from any rival, or any second! Still experience has amply testified, that mankind have, almost without ceasing, substituted other gods for JEHOVAH. Nay, it has clearly evinced not only, that we need to be taught the duty required by him in the text, but that no precepts, no instructions, and no motives, have been sufficient to keep the world in obedience to this first and greatest law of moral conduct. Nothing indeed has so strongly evinced the madness of the human heart, as the conduct which it has exhibited towards the Creator; and the idolatry which it has rendered to a vast multitude of the works of his hands.

The word *gods*, in this passage, may be regarded, as denoting not only *the various objects of religious worship*, but also *all the objects of supreme regard, affection*, or *esteem*. The command, it will be observed, is expressed in the absolute or universal manner; and may be fairly considered as including every thing to which mankind render, or can be supposed to render, such regard. The phrase, *before me*, is equivalent to the expressions, *in my sight, in my presence*; and teach us, that no such gods are to be admitted within the omnipresence, or within the view of the omniscience of JEHOVAH. With these explanations, it will be easily seen, that the text indispensably requires us *to acknowledge the real God as our God; and forbids us to regard any other being in this character*.

To acknowledge JEHOVAH as our God is to love him supremely, to fear before him with all the heart, and to serve him throughout all our days; in absolute preference to every other being. In this manner we testify, that we esteem him infinitely more excellent, venerable, and deserving of our obedience, than all other beings. After the observations which I have heretofore made concerning these subjects, it will be unnecessary to expatiate on them at the present time. I shall only observe, therefore, that this is the highest, the noblest, and the best service, which we can render to any being, and the only way in which we can acknowledge any being as God. When we render this service to JEHOVAH, we acknowledge him in his true charac-

ter. He is infinitely the greatest and the best of all beings; and we are under infinitely greater obligations to him than to any other. Of course, his claims to this service from us, and from all other intelligent creatures, are supreme and exclusive. When it is rendered by them, God is acknowledged to be what he is; thus divinely great and excellent. At the same time and in the same manner we declare, that by his character, and by his blessings, he has laid us under the highest obligations to such conduct.

As this is the only true, natural, and proper, acknowledgment of God; so when we render the same service to any creature, we acknowledge that creature as our God. In this conduct we are guilty of two gross and abominable sins. In the first place, we elevate the being, who is thus regarded, to the character and station of a God: and in the second place, we remove the true God, in our hearts, from his own character of infinite glory and excellence, and from that exalted station, which he holds as the infinite ruler and benefactor of the universe. This sin is a complication of wickedness, wonderfully various and dreadful. In truth, it is a comprehensive summary of iniquity, and the basis of all other crimes which are committed by intelligent creatures. The evil involved in it, may, in some measure, be learned from the following observations.

1st. *We are in this conduct guilty of the grossest falsehood.*

We practically deny, that JEHOVAH is possessed of those attributes which alone demand such service from intelligent creatures; and, on the other hand, assert in the same manner, that the being, to whom we render this service, is invested with these attributes. No falsehoods can be so gross or so abominable as these. Nor can they be uttered in any manner, so forcible, so provoking, or so guilty. Our practice is the real interpreter of our thoughts. The tongue may utter any thing at pleasure; but the heart is always disclosed by the language of the life.

2dly. *In this conduct also we are guilty of the greatest injustice.*

This evil is likewise twofold. First, we violate the rightful claim of JEHOVAH to the service of intelligent creatures: and, secondly, we render to a creature the ser-

vice which is due to him alone. The right which God has to this service, is supreme and inalienable. He is our Maker and Preserver. We are in the most absolute sense his property; and are bound therefore, by the highest obligation, to be voluntarily his; cheerfully to resign ourselves to his pleasure, and to be employed in doing his will. The obligations arising from this source, are not a little enhanced by the fact, that the service which he actually requires of us, is in the highest degree profitable to ourselves; our highest excellence, our greatest honour, and our supreme happiness. At the same time, these obligations are wonderfully increased by the consideration, that God is infinitely excellent and amiable, and therefore claims this testimony of our heart as the just and perfect acknowledgment of his perfect character. Were he *not* our creator, nor our preserver, we could not still refuse to render him this regard, without the greatest injury to so glorious a Being.

The created object to which we actually yield this service, is destitute of all claims to it. In rendering it to him, therefore, we add insult to injustice; and, not contented with denying and violating the rights of the Creator, we prefer to him in this manner a being who *is less than nothing, and vanity.*

3dly. *We are also guilty of the vilest ingratitude.*

From the wisdom, power, and goodness, of God, we derive our being, our blessings, and our hopes. He created us, he preserves us; and he daily *loads us with his loving-kindness.* He gave his Son to die for us; and sent his Spirit to sanctify us. It is impossible, that we should be in any circumstances which demand equal gratitude towards any, or towards all, created beings. The service, which he actually requires as the requital of all this beneficence, is no other than in our thoughts, affections, and conduct, to acknowledge him to what he is; to reverence him, as being infinitely great; to love him, as infinitely excellent; and to serve him, as the infinitely righteous and reasonable ruler of all things. What ingratitude can be compared with that of a creature who refuses this service? Yet even this ingratitude is mightily enhanced by the wanton wickedness of transferring the regard, which is due to him only, to one of

his creatures: a creature like ourselves; perhaps inferior to ourselves: a being, in this view, of no worth; to whom we are under no obligations; and who has not the smallest claim to any such homage. What crime can be more provoking, or more guilty, than the preference of such a creature to such a God?

It was observed above, that the sin forbidden in the text, is wickedness wonderfully complicated. Nothing would be more easy than to shew, that pride, rebellion, hatred of excellence, blasphemy, and many other sins, are included in this conduct. It would however be unnecessary for the present design, and the time which such an examination would demand, will, if I mistake not, be more profitably employed in attending to the following

REMARKS.

1st. *From these observations we learn, that idolatry is a sin of the first magnitude.*

That a sin, which combines in itself falsehood, injustice, and ingratitude, pride, rebellion, and blasphemy, all existing in the grossest and most impudent degree, is of the first magnitude, cannot be questioned with reason or decency. Equally evident is it, that a sin, which is at the bottom of all other wickedness, must be peculiarly enormous. That such is the nature of idolatry is unanswerably proved by the fact, that, wherever God is acknowledged in the manner above described, the moral character is of course spotless and unblamable. The commencement of turpitude in an intelligent creature is his alienation from God, and his preference of some other object to JEHOVAH. In proportion to the prevalence of this spirit, wickedness of every kind prevails; and in proportion to the degree in which the soul overcomes and renounces this preference, it becomes possessed of moral excellence in all its forms. This truth is strongly seen in the character and conduct of all those virtuous men whose history is recorded in the Scriptures. In a manner scarcely less forcible or certain, it is also seen in the experience of mankind. All virtue flourishes, wherever God is acknowledged according to the import of the text: and, wherever he is not thus acknowledged, all virtue decays and dies. The great, open, public acknowledg-

ment of God is exhibited in the solemnities of the sabbath and the sanctuary. Wherever these exist uniformly and prosperously, goodness of character and of life will be regularly found to prevail: wherever they decline or vanish, virtue invariably vanishes with them.

Nor is this truth less evident from the personal experience of every Christian. Whenever he magnifies in his heart his Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; all his affections are purified, evangelical, and heavenly. His *conversation* is *such as becometh godliness;* and his life *adorns the doctrine of God his Saviour;* is a happy resemblance of the celestial character, and a delightful preparation for celestial enjoyment. But when he ceases for a time to yield this glory to his Maker; when the importance of the divine character is lessened or obscured in his eyes; when God becomes to the view of his mind less venerable, less excellent, and less lovely; his apprehensions of spiritual objects are clouded and dim; his virtuous affections are cold, inactive, and lifeless. His purposes are bounded by the present world, and centred in himself; and his life is divested of its former beauty, worth, and enjoyment. God is the Sun of the soul. Wherever he shines, there is more moral day, warmth, life, and energy. There every thing excellent springs up beneath his quickening beams; grows unceasingly with vigour and beauty; and ripens into usefulness and enjoyment. In the absence of this divine luminary, the soul is darkened by night, and chilled by a moral winter. Its views become dim, its affections frozen and torpid, and its progress through life a scene of desolation.

2dly. *The same observations teach us, that all mankind are guilty of idolatry.*

Covetousness is styled *idolatry* by St Paul; and *stubbornness* by the prophet Samuel. To many other sins this title is obviously, and to all sin really, applicable. Sin universally, is no other than selfishness; or a preference of one's self to all other beings, and of one's private interests and gratifications to the well-being of the universe; of God and the intelligent creation. Of this selfishness all men are more or less the subjects. In the exercise of it, they love and serve themselves, *rather than the Creator, who is*

blessed for ever. Amen. No beings, except those who inhabit the world of perdition, are probably more undeserving of this high regard. We are not only little and insignificant, born of the dust and kindred to animals; but we are, and are in this very conduct, odious *and abominable, drinking iniquity like water.* To ourselves we render that supreme regard which is due to God only. Thus we literally idolize ourselves: and, as every man living is guilty of this conduct, every man living is essentially an idolater.

This spirit manifests itself, however, in an almost endless variety of forms. The parent often idolizes his child; the beauty, her face and form; the man of genius, his talents; the ambitious man, his fame, power, or station; the miser, his gold; the accomplished man, his manners; the ostentatious man, his villa; and the sensualist his pleasures. By all these, however, a single spirit is cherished, and discovered. The parent dotes upon his child, because it is *his* child. Had it been born of other parents; it might, indeed, be occasionally agreeable to him, but would never have become an object of this peculiar fondness.

This is unanswerably evinced by experience; particularly by the fact, that much more promising and engaging children are never thus doted upon, when they are the children of his fellow-men. What is true of this instance is generally true of the others. Our homage is rendered to *our own* talents, possessions, and enjoyments; not to those of our fellow-men. One spirit, therefore, pervades and reigns throughout, all this varied idolatry.

3dly. *With these observations in view, we shall cease to wonder, that mankind have been so extensively guilty of continual and enormous sins against each other.*

Sin is one undivided disposition. If it exists in any intelligent being, it exists and operates towards any and every other being with whom he is concerned. It cannot exist towards God, and not towards man; or towards man, and not towards God. It is a wrong bias of the soul; and, of course, operates only to wrong, whatever being the operation may respect.

That those who are guilty of such falsehood towards God, should be guilty of gross falsehood towards each other, to whom they are under far less obligations of every kind, is certainly to be expected. That those, who with such gross injustice violate all rights, the highest, the most absolute, should without remorse violate rights of so inferior a nature, is no less to be expected. Equally is it a thing of course, that beings guilty of such enormous ingratitude, should be ungrateful to each other, whenever this conduct will serve a purpose. *He that is unjust, will,* in this sense, *be unjust still; and he that is filthy, will be filthy still.*

In this manner are explained the monstrous iniquities which filled the heathen world. These evils commenced in their religion. They forsook JEHOVAH, and *had other gods before him;* gods of all kinds, natures, and descriptions. A rational mind, sufficiently astonished at their defection from the true God, is lost in amazement while contemplating the objects which they actually worshipped. No being, real or imaginary, was excluded from a list of their deities, or prevented from the homage of their devotions, by any degree of stupidity, folly, or wickedness. They worshipped blocks: they worshipped brutes: they worshipped men; usually the worst of men: they worshipped devils.

Their religion, in all its solemn services, was exactly suited to the character of their gods. Beyond measure was it stupid, silly, impure, and depraved. It was replete with enormous and unnatural *cruelty.* Specimens of this wickedness, and those innumerable, are found in the various kinds of torture enjoined as a religious penance for their sins; and in the sacrifice of human victims, adopted as expiations for the guilt of their surviving countrymen. Among these, youths of the noblest birth, the brightest talents, and the most promising character, were, in several nations, butchered by hundreds, to satisfy the vengeance of their gods. In Hindostan, beside other human victims, twenty thousand women are declared, with unquestionable evidence, to be even now offered up annually, as victims to religion, on the funeral piles of their deceased husbands. Equally replenished was this religion with wonderful *false-*

hood. All the oracles, divinations, visions, dreams, and prophecies, of heathenism, were a mere collection of lies. The same spirit of falsehood pervaded their mythology, their mysteries, their doctrines, their worship, and the means of preserving it. As their religion had no foundation in reason or revelation; they were, in a sense, compelled, if it was to be preserved at all, to resort to fraud and delusion for the means both of supporting the worship itself, and the authority of those who prescribed it, among the infatuated worshippers. Thus *the gods of the heathen were vanity and a lie: they that made them were like unto them; and so was every one who put his trust in them.* Nor was this scheme less deformed by *pollution.* In Egypt, Syria, Paphos, Babylon, and Hindostan, particularly, both matrons and virgins were religiously consecrated to impurity.

By the cruelty, falsehood, and pollution, acted *here,* the heathen nations were effectually prepared to perpetuate the same wickedness *elsewhere.* Here it was sanctioned by religion: the mind, therefore, could not consider it as very criminal elsewhere. As all were thus taught; these nations became generally corrupted beyond every thing which the most sanguine imagination could have conceived.

All this, however, is naturally the result of idolatry. That, which is the object of religious worship, is of course the most sublime and perfect object which is realized by the devotee. When this object, therefore, is low, debased, impure; when it is fraught with falsehood, injustice, and cruelty; sunk, as it is, immeasurably below the proper character of a god, it still keeps its station of superiority; and is still regarded with the reverence due to the highest known object of contemplation. Of consequence, all things beside sink with it; and hold a station, in the eye of the mind, proportionally depressed. The mind itself particularly, being destitute of any higher conceptions than those which respect this debased object, conforms all its views, affections, and conduct, to the character of its deity; and, while it worships him with a mixture of folly and wickedness, it extends the same folly and wickedness in its various conduct towards all other beings with which it corresponds.

Thus a debased god becomes the foundation of a debased religion; and a debased religion, of universal turpitude of character.

4thly. *Hence we see, that the Scriptures represent idolatry justly; and annex to it no higher punishment than it deserves.*

The debased and miserable character which I have described, was the real character of the Canaanites. They were guilty of all these iniquities; and were, therefore, justly the objects of the divine indignation. Infinitely remote from that innocence attributed to them by infidels, they had grown worse and worse, under the ordinary influence of idolatry, from the beginning. At length their *iniquity* became *full;* and they were wiped away as a blot, as a stain, upon the creation of God.

The same things are, with some qualifications, true of the Israelites. In the progress of their various defections to idolatry, they became corrupted in the same dreadful manner; were guilty of the same impurity, cruelty, and falsehood; butchered each other without remorse; were disloyal, rebellious, treacherous; followed abandoned villains to overturn the government established by God himself; waged furious civil wars with each other; and made *their sons pass through the fire unto Moloch.* God, with wonderful patience and mercy, waited long, and sent many prophets to reclaim them; yet nothing cured them of their idolatry, but their final overthrow, and their deportation to Babylon.

What is true of these nations, with regard to this subject, is true of the heathen in general. All the nations who have been devoted to idolatry, have addicted themselves to these and all other crimes; and have been dreadfully depraved in their whole moral character. Wherever men of discernment and integrity have resided among such nations, and given an account of them to the public; this melancholy truth has, notwithstanding all the allegations of infidels to the contrary, been evinced beyond every decent denial, or reasonable doubt.

5thly. *These observations teach us the wisdom and good-*

ness of God in separating the Jews from mankind, as a peculiar people to himself.

All the preceding experiments, which had been made in the providence of God, for the purpose of preserving in this corrupted world the knowledge and worship of JEHOVAH, had failed of accomplishing the end. God had revealed himself in an immediate and extraordinary manner to our first parents, and to their descendants through many generations. All these also he had planted in a world, which, though under the curse, retained still so much of its original nature, and was fraught with so many blessings, as to continue the life of man through a thousand years. Under this dispensation, *all flesh corrupted his way upon the earth.* The world *was filled with violence;* and became so universally profligate, that *it repented the Lord that he had made man.* The deluge then emptied it of its inhabitants, to sweep away wickedness, which could no longer be endured, from under the whole heaven. Even this did not cure the evil. The same spirit, notwithstanding the remembrance of this terrible destruction, revived almost immediately among the descendants of Noah; and at the time when Abraham was called, all nations were on the point of losing the knowledge of the one living and true God. Had not the Jews been separated from the rest of mankind; and by mercies and miracles of a singular nature recalled from time to time to the worship of JEHOVAH; this glorious Being would long since have been forgotten in the world. We ourselves, and all the inhabitants of this happy land, should now have been bowing ourselves to stocks; offering up our children as victims to Moloch; and prostituting ourselves and our families in religious and regular pollution before the shrines of idolatry. The only knowledge, the only worship, of JEHOVAH, at this day existing in the world, is derived ultimately from the revelation which he made of himself to the Jews, and the various dispensations by which it was preserved.

6thly. *We learn hence also the malignant nature of Atheism.*

Atheism, like idolatry, is infinitely remote from being a

mere innocent speculation; a mere set of harmless opinions. In its very nature it involves the grossest falsehood, injustice, and ingratitude; and is of course the parent of all other sins in all possible degrees. The mind in which it exists, must, in order to the reception of it, have become the seat of wonderful depravity; and is prepared by it for every conceivable perpetration. I do not deny, that an atheist may live decently in the world. But whenever this is the fact, he lives in this manner, solely because the commission of the several crimes to which he finds a temptation, is accompanied by some apprehended danger, some serious difficulty, or some painful inconvenience; some evil so great, as to overbalance the pleasure which he expects from committing the crime. But he never lives in this manner from principle; never from the want of disposition to sin. Let it be barely convenient and safe for him; and there is no iniquity, which his head will not contrive, his heart cherish, and his hands carry into execution. From an Atheist, no man, no people, no human interest, can ever be safe; unless when danger to himself preserves them from the effects of his profligacy.

7thly. *We see with what exact propriety the Scriptures have represented the violation of our immediate duty to God as the source of all other sin.*

Impiety is plainly the beginning, the fountain, of guilt, from which flows every stream. Those who are thus false, unjust, and ungrateful, to God, will of course exhibit the same conduct with respect to their fellow-creatures. Virtue is a single indivisible principle; operating *as virtue* towards every being with whom it is concerned; towards God, towards our neighbour, and towards ourselves. Towards all it operates alike; producing in every case the fruits of virtue, *viz.* virtuous affections and virtuous conduct. As the obligations to be virtuous towards God, or in other words, to be pious, are the highest possible; so he who is insensible to these obligations, and violates these, will be insensible to all other obligations, and violate them also. The apprehension, that virtue can exist partially, that is, that we can be disposed to perform our duty towards

God and not towards man, or towards man and not towards God, is chimerical; the result of ignorance, or inconsideration; and unsupported either by facts or arguments.

External virtue, as it is sometimes called, that is, moral goodness, supposed to exist in external conduct only, and unsupported by virtue in the heart, is a mere dream; a mere shadow. Instead of virtue, it is nothing but convenience; nothing but a pretence; nothing but a cheat. Virtue is inherent in the soul; in the disposition; as light and warmth in the sunbeams; and is the energy of an intelligent being, voluntarily directed to that which is right and good. If piety therefore be not found in a man, he has no pretensions to virtue of any kind.

Such is the scheme of the Scriptures. How plainly is it true! In laying the foundation of virtue here, how evidently have they laid the only possible foundation! And how strongly do they approve themselves to the conscience as truth; and as deserving the character of a revelation from God! At the same time, how evidently are all other schemes of morality visionary and vain; buildings erected on sand; and destined, from the beginning, to a speedy and final overthrow!

SERMON CI.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE DECALOGUE. THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, nor any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow thyself down to them, nor serve them; for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.—EXOD. XX. 4—6.

THE command in the text differs from that which was considered in the preceding discourse, in this manner. *That* forbade *the acknowledgment of false gods universally: this* prohibits *the worship of idols; or idolatry properly so called.* All worship rendered to false gods, is not uncommonly styled idolatry: but the name, in the strict sense, is applicable to the worship of idols only; or of those images, pictures, and other symbols, which were considered by the heathen as representatives of their gods.

In the preceding discourse I observed, that the duty enjoined in the first command is of such a nature, that, to a mind governed by the dictates of reason, an express injunction of it would seem in a great measure unnecessary, if not altogether superfluous. Of the command in the text, it may with equal propriety be observed, that to such a mind, no precept given in the Scriptures could seem more unnecessary, or more superfluous. Nothing to the eye of reason can appear more wonderful, or more improbable, than that beings endowed with intelligence, should bow themselves before the stock of a tree, or acknowledge an image, molten or carved by themselves, as an object of their worship. Experience has, however, in the most ample manner, re-

futed these very natural and very obvious dictates of reason: and has shewn, to the everlasting disgrace of the human name, that not only some, but almost all, men have, throughout most ages of the world, prostrated themselves before these miserable objects; and in their conversation, their books, their laws, and their religious services, acknowledged them as their gods. The importance, the absolute necessity, of this command, therefore, are evinced beyond every reasonable question.

The observations which I propose to make concerning it, I shall comprise under the following heads:

I. *The history of idol worship;*

II. *Its extent;* and,

III. *The manner in which it has been performed.*

I. *I will recite to you a brief and very general history of idol worship.*

We are not informed in the Scriptures of the precise time in which idolatry commenced. It is, however, abundantly evident, that it began not long after the deluge. According to the chronology commonly received, Abraham was born in the year 1997 before Christ, and in the year of the world 2008: three hundred and fifty-two years after the flood; and two years only after the death of Noah. Early as this date is, the ancestors of Abraham seem to have been idolaters for several generations. Joshua, in a solemn assembly of the tribes of Israel at Shechem, addressed the principal men of that nation after the following manner; *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time; even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor; and they served other gods.* From this passage it appears, that Terah himself was, in the earlier periods of life, a worshipper of false gods. In the fifth chapter of the book of Judith, the following account is given of this subject, in a speech of Achior, commander of the host of the Ammonites, to Holofernes, general of the Assyrian army. "This people are descended of the Chaldeans; and they sojourned heretofore in Mesopotamia, because they would not follow the gods of their fathers which were in the land of Chaldea. For they left the way of their ancestors, and worshipped

the God of heaven, whom they knew: so they cast them out from the face of their gods; and they fled into Mesopotamia, and sojourned there many days." This story, which was probably traditionary among the Jews and neighbouring nations, and is not improbably true, informs us, that Terah, and his children with him, worshipped the true God before they quitted Ur of Chaldees; and that they were driven out from this their original residence by their countrymen, because they had addicted themselves to the worship of JEHOVAH. It would seem, therefore, that the Chaldeans had already become such bigots to the worship of their gods, as to persecute Terah and his family for dissenting from what had become their established religion. This event took place four hundred and twenty-two years only after the deluge. Gentilism, therefore, or the worship of false gods, must have commenced many years before this date; both because it was the religion of Abraham's ancestors, and because it had become so universal in Chaldea, as to be the foundation of a national persecution of Terah and his family.

Sir William Jones has, I think, in the most satisfactory manner, proved, that the system of Gentilism, among all the ancient nations who adopted it, was the same. This remarkable fact, if admitted, furnishes unanswerable evidence, that it was derived from a single source. For it is impossible, that different and distant nations should have severally invented so complicated a system; comprising so many gods, having the same names, having the same fabulous history of their origin and character, worshipped with the same numerous and diversified rites, and having the same various and peculiar offices assigned to them. The best account of this extraordinary fact which I have met with, is contained in Bryant's Analysis of the Ancient Heathen Mythology. This learned and able writer has, in my view, rendered it highly probable, that this religion was begun by the Cushites, or that mixed multitude who attached themselves to Nimrod, according to the common chronology, about the year of the world 1750; and formed themselves, seven years after, into a nation, or body politic, under his dominion. These people, in their dispersion, spread over many parts of the earth; and by their enterprise, he-

roism, arts, and ingenuity, appear to have had the first great and controlling influence over the affairs of men, both secular and religious: an influence, the effects of which wonderfully remain at the present time.

The objects and the rites of worship adopted by these people, seem almost all to have been found in the history of the deluge of Noah and of his family. At first, they probably intended only to commemorate in a solemn manner this awful and disastrous event, and the wonderful preservation of this family. That a man of so excellent and extraordinary a character; a man, singled out by the voice of God from a world on account of his piety; a man, who was the only pious head of a family amidst all the millions of the human race; a man, who had survived the ruins of one world, and begun the settlement and population of another; a man, who had been miraculously preserved from a universal deluge; a man, to whom the postdiluvians owed all their religion, their knowledge, their arts, and even their existence; should be commemorated with singular feelings, particularly with singular veneration, was a thing of course. Equally natural and necessary was it, that the most solemn remembrance should be retained and expressed of such an amazing event, as the desertion of a world. High veneration for any being, easily slides, in such a mind as ours, into religious reverence: especially when it is publicly and solemnly expressed, by ceremonies of an affecting and awful nature. When Noah particularly, and his sons generally, had been often, and for a series of years, commemorated in this manner; the history of man has amply taught us, that it was no strange thing to find them ultimately raised to the rank and character of deities. This event would naturally take place the sooner, on account of the astonishing facts included in their singular history. The imagination, wrought up to enthusiasm and terror, while realizing the astonishing scenes through which they had passed, could hardly fail to lend its powerful aid towards this act of canonization; and would, without much reluctance, attribute to them a divine character. If we remember how much more willingly mankind have ever worshipped false gods, than the true one; we shall, I think, without much hesitation, admit the probability of

the account which has here been given concerning this subject.

The proofs, that the authors of Gentilism had a primary reference to Noah, his family, and their history, appear to me to be complete in the different symbols, ceremonies, objects of commemoration, and names of persons and things, together with the whole mythological history of this subject. Multitudes of allusions are found in all these things to Noah himself; his three sons; the number of his family; their singular history, the deluge, the ark, the dove, the olive branch, and various other particulars. Many of these are too explicit to be mistaken; and many others less explicit, yet taken together, and in connexion with these, corroborate, with no small force, the account which has here been given.

When this scheme was once begun, it was a thing of course, that it should be rapidly progressive. When mankind had departed from the true God; it was natural for a restless imagination to multiply the objects of its dependance and worship. Among the objects which would easily engross the religious attention of these people, and of all who were inclined to their system, the sun, moon, and stars, would undoubtedly be some of the first. The exaltation, splendour, immutability, and beneficial influence, of these glorious luminaries, are so affecting to the human mind, as to hold always a distinguished place in its contemplations. Nothing visible is more fitted to excite sublime emotions, or to awaken curiosity and astonishment; nor, when God was once forgotten, to inspire religious reverence. Accordingly we find, that before the days of Job the worship of the heavenly bodies had become extensive. This divine writer* says, chap. xxxi. 26—28. *If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand; this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.* Job probably lived between one thousand six hundred and one thousand seven hundred years before Christ; or about three hundred and fifty years after the birth of Abraham;

* I consider Job as the author of this book.

according to the common chronology. With this account of the early worship of these celestial objects, profane history entirely accords.

But the mind was unsatisfied even with these deities. The business of multiplying them was carried on with astonishing rapidity. The worship of deceased men had already been rendered to Noah and his family. This was soon extended to others; and then to others still; in such a manner, that the number soon became enormous. Hesiod informs us, that the δαιμονες, or *demons*, who appear to have been no other than to departed men, and who were supposed to inhabit the middle regions between earth and heaven, amounted to more than thirty thousand. In opposition to these *deceased beings*, God is especially called in the sacred volume the *living God.** From deceased men the transition was easy to animals; to vegetables; to inanimate objects; and to the visionary beings of imagination. Gods were soon found every where; in mountains, rivers, springs, the ocean, the earth, the winds, light, darkness, groves; and generally in every thing which was particularly interesting to the fancy.

Among the reasons which influenced the mind to this restless and endless creation of deities, *the first place is due perhaps to the apprehension, that this conduct was an evidence of peculiar piety; and therefore a direct mode of obtaining blessings from some or other of the objects worshipped.* Another reason was, *the complaisance of one nation to another, which led them to adopt their respective deities.* The objects of worship were, to a great extent, the same in different nations: yet, being called by different names, and worshipped with ceremonies, differing in some degree, at least according to the diversity of manners in different nations, they came at length to be considered as different gods. The Athenians, under the influence of both these causes, appear to have adopted most of the deities of whom they had any knowledge.

Another reason for this conduct, judiciously assigned by Dr. Blair, is, *the tendency of the human imagination to lend animation, thought, and agency, to the several inanimate ob-*

jects with which it is conversant, and by which it is strongly affected; particularly to those which are solemn, awful, and sublime. The transition from the personification of these objects to the belief, that they are really animated by an indwelling, conscious principle, and to a consequent religious reverence for them, is neither unnatural nor difficult, after the mind has once become devoted to idolatry. In the early stages of society, the *imagination* is eminently strong, active, and susceptible. Always ready to admire, to be astonished, to be transported, it easily acquires an ascendancy over the *reason*, then always weak; and, together with *the passions*, directs almost the whole conduct of man.

It is scarcely credible, that the human mind originally worshipped inanimate objects *directly*. The absurdity of believing, that that which had no life in itself, and therefore no agency nor consciousness, could hear prayers, or answer them, could be gratified with praises or sacrifices, could inflict judgments, or confer benefits, is so palpable, that even a savage can hardly be supposed to have admitted it. Much less can those people have admitted it, who appear to have been the originators of idolatry. So far were the Cushites from being savages, that they appear to have been the most enlightened and enterprising of the human race at the time when Gentilism commenced. It is highly probable, that all these objects were at first regarded as peculiar manifestations of the real Deity; fitted especially to display his attributes to man, and to make the most forcible impressions of his agency. In process of time, however, they began to be considered, especially by the ignorant multitude, as being really gods: and the worship originally addressed to a being, supposed to be manifested by the symbol, seems ultimately to have been rendered to the symbol itself. The stock and the stone, intended at first to bring the real Deity before the senses, took at length the place of that Deity; and became in the end the real objects of worship.

It is evident, from several ancient writers quoted by Shuckford,* particularly Clemens Alexandrinus, Herodian,

* See Shuckford's Sacred and Profane History Connected,

and Pausanias, that *pillars of stone*, and after them *rude blocks of wood*, were *the first symbols* made by mankind of their several deities. Such, it is supposed, were the *teraphim* of Laban stolen from him by his daughter: and such plainly were the religious symbols formed at early periods by the Greeks, and some other nations. Stones in their native rude state, such for example as that erected by Jacob at Bethel, seem extensively to have been set up at early periods, with various religious views and designs, by the worshippers of the true God. The pillars devoted to idolatrous purposes, seem to have been derived from these. They were not, however, long satisfied with these unsightly objects. The Egyptians appear to have had carved images, devoted to the purposes of religion, and, without any doubt, molten ones also, before the time of Moses; for we find the children of Israel forming a molten calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. The practice of forming idols in this manner, being once begun, seems to have spread with great rapidity among the nations who maintained a mutual correspondence. In the more distant and insulated colonies of men, their existence began at much later periods. In Italy, all visible symbols of the Deity were prohibited by Numa Pompilius; and were not introduced into Rome, according to the testimony of Plutarch, so late as one hundred and seventy years after the building of that city: that is, A. M. 3426: in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Among the savages of this country, images seem to have been little used.

II. *I shall now make a few observations concerning the extent of idol worship.*

The system of Gentilism commenced, as has been already remarked, in the plain of Shinar. The Cushites, who were the authors of it, ruled, for a short period, most of their brethren in the neighbouring countries. Soon after the confusion of languages, an event which seems to have been chiefly confined to them and their associates, and which entirely disqualified them for all the efforts depend-

vol. 1. p. 315, ed. 1819, published by Baynes, Paternoster-row, London.

ing on union and concert, they began to disperse into different parts of the earth. Speedily after this, they appear to have been attacked by their brethren of the family of Shem, settled in Nineveh and its neighbourhood, and heretofore reduced under their dominion. On this occasion, the Cushites were completely routed, and forced to fly with great expedition into different parts of the earth. One body of them fled into Hindostan; in the records of which country various events of their history are still found. Another made their way into Canaan; where they were again attacked by the same people, under the command of Chedorlaomer, and again overthrown. Hence they fled into Egypt; the western parts of Arabia; and the northern and eastern parts of Abyssinia. From Egypt they were again driven; and went into Phœnicia; the Lesser Asia; Greece; Thrace; Italy; and other countries bordering on the Mediterranean and Euxine seas. Whithersoever they went, they carried with them their enterprise, arts, learning, and religion. Most of the countries in which they settled, embraced their idolatry at early periods. At a very early period, we find it the religion of the ancestors of Abraham in Chaldea. These were descendants of Shem; who outlived Abraham himself; and who, with all his piety and authority, was still unable to prevent this senseless desertion of the true religion. In Hindostan also it spread, at a very early date; as it did also in the western countries of Asia, in Egypt, and most or all of the eastern parts of Europe. The worship of the true God was however not universally renounced, until many ages after the commencement of Gentilism. Melchisedec, Job, his friends, and undoubtedly many of his countrymen; the people of the Thebais, or Upper Egypt, and probably many others in different parts of the world; still retained the true religion, long after idolatry had been embraced by a great portion of the human race. After the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan, we find few traces of the true religion. We are not however to suppose it to have been wholly banished from all other countries, till sometime afterward. The precise period, when the whole world beside the Jews became idolatrous I am unable to determine.

In the fourth century after the birth of Christ, a new kind

of idolatry, or rather idolatry in a new form, began to exist in *the Christian church.* This was *the worship of saints and angels;* and afterward, of *images, pictures, relics,* and other fantastical objects of devotion. This idolatry, though at first vigorously opposed by the body of the church, and afterward by individuals and small collections of men, spread speedily over the whole of Christendom; and was adopted both by the learned and unlearned of every country. Thus, in one form or another, the worship of false gods has prevailed throughout most of the inhabited world, and the greatest part of the reign of time. I shall now

III. *Make a few observations on the manner in which this worship has been performed.*

I have already mentioned idols as being intended originally to be *means of worshipping God: symbols of the divine character and attributes,* designed to impress them powerfully on the senses, and thus to excite in the mind animated sentiments of awe and devotion. Beside the use of these images, Gentilism copied closely in its worship, the ritual originally enjoyed by God, and adopted in the pure worship. *Prayers, praises, sacrifices,* and *oblations,* were all offered up to its various deities. *Fastings, ablutions,* and *penance of many kinds,* were enjoined on their infatuated votaries. *Temples* were erected to them; altars built; shrines formed; and regular *orders of priests* established, and consecrated to an exclusive performance of their religious services. *Oracles* also, which were sometimes pretended expressions of the will of these gods concerning the immediate duties of men, and sometimes professed predictions of future events, were delivered in most or all of the countries where idolatry prevailed. The *victims* offered, were to a great extent the same which were prescribed in the law of Moses: probably the same which had been offered from the beginning: for we find Noah, immediately after the deluge, *offering of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, burnt-offerings on the altar* which he had made. It well deserves to be remarked, that in all the records of heathen worship which have come down to us, the votaries appear *neither to have asked nor given thanks for*

moral good. Secular enjoyments of every kind they universally solicited; but goodness of heart seems never to have been thought of as a gift coming from the gods. Accordingly, Cicero, who must have been well acquainted with this subject, says, Who ever thanked the gods for his virtue?

Processions seem also to have been extensively used as a part of the religious ceremonial of Gentilism. These, together with the magnificence of its temples, the costliness of its images, and the pomp of its services, were all intended to affect the senses in the deepest manner. Indeed nothing else could be done to keep this system alive. Argument was only hostile to it. The light of sound reason would have dispelled its darkness in a moment. But the senses, and through them the imagination, could be strongly addressed; and these could entirely govern the man.

To add to the splendour of all other objects connected with this service, and to render the oblation more affecting to the suppliant, as well as more acceptable to the Deity, offerings of every kind were made more and more expensive. Gold, silver, gems, the choicest aromatics, and unguents and essences made of them, still more precious than gold itself, were frequent presents to the gods of idolatry. Hecatombs were early substituted for single victims: and, to render the worship still more propitiatory, these were soon exchanged for human sacrifices. To complete the efficacy of the oblation, these sacrifices were selected from the brightest and most promising youths of the nation; the sons of the noble and the princely, and infants in the most lovely and endearing period of life. Victims of this kind, also, were multiplied to a wonderful degree. Twenty thousand human beings are supposed to have expired annually on the altars of Mexico alone; and all those were offered up with circumstances of cruelty and horror, which, but for the most indubitable testimony, would transcend belief. To these dreadful services, violating every feeling of humanity, but wonderfully affecting the imagination, were added ablutions, burdensome on account of their frequency, and often on account of the great distance of the sacred waters from the residence of the suppliant; and various kinds of penance, terrible and excruciating in their nature,

and overwhelming by their duration, were customarily added. Thus, though reason and humanity were wounded and prostrated, the imagination was completely possessed by the demons of superstition: and miserable man, voluntarily losing the government of himself, became the sport of fiends and furies, and fitted only for the gloom and chains of Bedlam.

With the same design, and under the same impulse, mankind sought the most solitary and the most awful recesses for the celebration of their religious rites.* In dark and lonely groves, on the summits of lofty eminences, and in the depths of awful caverns, the most solemn rites of Gentile worship were performed at early periods. These scenes of stillness, solitude, and terror, were perfectly suited to rouse the imagination to ecstacy, and to enhance the gloomy fervours of their religion. To them succeeded temples of astonishing magnificence; exhausting, in their erection, the wealth of nations, and the labour of ages. These also were ornamented within and without with every thing which riches, ingenuity, and art, could supply; or which was calculated to impress the mind of the votary with astonishment, religious awe, and profound reverence, for the beings to whom these structures were consecrated.

It cannot, I think, be necessary for me to employ any arguments for the purpose of enforcing the prohibition in the text on the minds of my audience. The importance of it to the Jews at the time when it was given, and to the great body of mankind both before and since, is abundantly evident from the observations which have been already made. But in this land, and in the present state of religious society here, no transgression is less likely to exist, than that which is forbidden in this passage of Scripture. Instead of attempting to enforce this precept, therefore, on those who hear me; I shall employ the remaining time in making a few practical

REMARKS.

1st. *How degrading, melancholy, and sinful a character is here presented to us of man!*

* See Maurice's Antiquities, vol. 2.

This subject, perhaps more than any other, holds out to our view a wonderful exhibition of the depravity of the human heart. What sight can be more strange, more humiliating, more debasing, to an intelligent nature, than that of rational and immortal minds, originally virtuous as they came from the hand of God, destined to the possession of endless life, and formed for such noble and sublime purposes, prostrating themselves not only before the sun, and moon, and *the host of heaven*, but before men, evil spirits, visionary beings, animals, vegetables, blocks of wood, and figures of stone! All these beings, such minds have converted into deities; and falling down before them, have said unto them, *Deliver us, for ye are our gods.* Is it not beyond measure amazing, to see a human being, a rational, immortal being, go into a forest; cut down a tree; transport it home on a waggon; burn one part of it on his hearth; hew and carve another part of it into an idol; and call it a god! Is it not amazing, to see such a man confessing himself inferior to a stock, fashioned by his own hands, acknowledging his dependance on it for life, his blessings, and his hopes; placing his trust in it; building to it temples; erecting altars; and offering up to it prayers and praises! Is it not more amazing, to behold the same man sacrificing living victims to a mass of wood; rational victims; nay, more, youths of the noblest families, the brightest talents, and the fairest hopes; nay, more still, his own beloved offspring; the children of his own bowels!

What shall we say then, what shall we not say, when we behold kings, heroes, and sages, employed in this manner? When we see towns, provinces, countries, and continents, nay, the whole earth, all uniting in this infatuated worship; with a universal forgetfulness of JEHOVAH, the creator, preserver, and benefactor, of all beings; notwithstanding the hourly demonstration of his perfections and agency in the visible universe!

Still more astonished ought we to be, if we can be more astonished, to see the Israelites, after the wonders of Egypt, Sinai, and Canaan, in the midst of all the marvellous blessings given to their nation, with the word of God in their hands, while his prophets were announcing to them his re-

velations, while his awful oracles from the mercy-seat were still sounding in their ears, within his temple, before his altar, and beneath the awful splendour of the Shechinah; *forgetting the God that made them, and lightly esteeming the Rock of their salvation;* wandering after the idolatry of the Heathen, bowing before their gods, partaking in their sacrifices, absorbed in their follies, and embracing their wickedness with all their heart.

To complete this dreadful picture of human depravity, the whole Christian world, with few, very few exceptions, was for many centuries buried and lost in this stupid, shameful, monstrous worship. The progeny of Noah, who began this unnatural defection from their Creator, became idolaters, while the waves of the deluge had scarcely ceased to roar around this wasted world. The Jews became idolaters at the foot of Sinai, beneath the thunders of the Almighty. The Christian world became idolaters, when the Redeemer was in a sense bleeding on the cross before their eyes. How debased then, how sinful, how miserable, a being is man!

2dly. *These observations teach us the indispensable necessity of a revelation to such a world as this.*

It has been shewn, that at an early period after the flood, the whole human race lost the knowledge of the true God, and sunk into the moral stupidity and wickedness of Gentilism. That rational beings should be created or exist for any end which does not involve in it the knowledge and worship of the true God, is a doctrine indefensible by a single rational argument. What purpose could beings, destitute of this knowledge and worship, be supposed to answer? What purpose, I mean, which God could propose, or which he could admit as useful, as desirable, as worthy of himself? Can he be supposed to have formed rational and immortal beings, to be ignorant of him; the only source of good, of wisdom, excellence, and happiness? Can he be supposed to have made such beings capable of knowing and glorifying him, for the debased and wretched end of worshipping gods of gold, silver, wood, and stone? Of worshipping them also with ser-

vices deformed with falsehood, cruelty, and impurity, and attended by a total destruction of all wisdom, and all virtue? Such, however, to a vast extent has been, and such without revelation would have for ever been, the condition of mankind. Revelation only has taught and preserved the knowledge and worship of the true God in this guilty world: and Mohammedans and infidels are no less indebted to revelation for this knowledge, than are Jews and Christians.

Piety has been heretofore shewn to be the foundation of all other virtue, the first and greatest branch of this glorious subject, without which the virtue exercised towards our fellow-creatures and towards ourselves cannot exist. But piety is impossible on the system of Gentilism. The great constituents of this divine affection of the heart are love, reverence, and resignation. But how can love, reverence, and resignation, be exercised towards an ox, a crocodile, a cat, a frog, a fly, an onion, a stick of wood, or block of marble? Here, plainly, there is nothing to be loved, reverenced, or regarded, with resignation. In the mean time, perpetual frauds, falsehoods, cruelties, and impurities, added a total corruption of all the affections and conduct of man towards himself, and his fellow-men, to the supreme debasement of his character, produced of course by the acknowledgment and worship of Heathen gods. This system therefore banished moral excellence from the mind, and introduced into its place every thing that was despicable, worthless, and wicked. He who does not see the absolute necessity of a revelation to beings situated as the inhabitants of this world were, must be voluntarily blind, and must love to be deceived. You, my hearers, are now in the house of God. You know his existence, presence, character, and agency. You are employed in his worship. You have heard the glorious tidings of forgiving, redeeming, and sanctifying love. The Redeemer of mankind, and the expiation which he has made of sin, have been announced to you from the cradle. *This house* is to you *the gate of heaven*. Here the highway commences which leads to that glorious world. Immortal life here dawns upon you. A voice from amidst the throne of God invites you

here to *take of the water of life freely*. All these blessings are brought to you by revelation. But for revelation you would have been this day worshipping a demon, or an ox, or falling down before the stock of a tree. But for revelation, you might this day have been imbruing your hands in the blood of one of your number, butchered as a miserable victim to Moloch. *Blessing, and honour, and glory, and thanksgiving, be unto our God for* this *unspeakable gift through* Jesus Christ, our Lord! Amen.

SERMON CII.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE DECALOGUE. THE THIRD COMMANDMENT. THE NATURE OF PROFANENESS.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain.—EXOD. XX. 7.

IN the two preceding discourses I have considered at some length, *the nature of the sins forbidden in the first and second commands of the decalogue.* I did not think it necessary, after the ample discussion of the duties of piety so lately delivered from this place, to dwell anew upon the same duties, as required by *the former of these commands;* nor, on account of the state of Christian society in this country, to insist on the prohibition contained in *the latter.* Considering the subjects of both as sufficiently canvassed for the design of these discourses; I shall now proceed to examine *the nature of the precept given to us in the text.*

The name of God, as used in the Scriptures, has, by divines of all descriptions, been generally regarded as denoting, his *name literally; his titles of every kind; his perfections:* and, generally, *every thing by which his character and his pleasure are made known to mankind.*

To take the name of God in vain, is to use all or either of these to no valuable purpose; or to evil purposes; or with falsehood; or with irreverence.

Of him who does this, God declares that *he will not hold him guiltless;* that is, *that he will not hold him guilty;* especially, in the great day of trial and decision.

In discoursing on this subject, I shall examine,

I. *The nature;*

II. *The guilt;* and,

III. *The danger, of this sin.*

I. I shall examine with attention the nature of this sin.

The nature of this sin may be advantageously unfolded by considering it *as it respects the name and the works of God.*

By the name of God I intend, the *several names and titles by which he has been pleased to distinguish himself, and to manifest his character to mankind. In his works I shall include every thing which he has wrought, instituted, and declared, as an especial manifestation of his presence, perfections, and agency.*

The name of God is *profaned,* that is, *treated with the irreverence* which is the object of the prohibition in the text,

1st. *In perjury, or false swearing.*

Ye shall not swear by my name falsely; neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am Jehovah. Lev. xx. 12. To swear falsely is *to invoke God to witness a lie.* It is scarcely possible to conceive of a grosser insult to the Creator of the universe than this. He, as all men perfectly well know, infinitely loves truth, and infinitely detests falsehood; and has said, that *there shall in nowise enter into the heavenly city any one who loveth or maketh a lie.* To call him then, in this solemn manner, to witness a falsehood, is to laugh at his love of truth, his disposition and power to support it, and that glorious purity of his character, before which *the heavens are unclean, and the angels charged with folly.*

2dly. *When the name of God is used in any light, irreverent manner; the same sin is committed.*

The most prominent and most usual modes of trans-

gressing in this manner, are *profane cursing and swearing.* In cases of this nature, the name of God is frequently employed to accompany and enhance diversion; frequently as the means of giving vent, with peculiar force, to the violence of anger; often, also, is it used to aggravate denunciations of revenge; and very often dishonoured by unhallowed lips in imprecations of evil on our fellow-men. In every one of these methods the name of God is profaned, times without number, every day.

This glorious and awful Being, as I have already observed, has all possible claims to the highest reverence. Every thing teaches us this doctrine: the creation and the providence of God; reason and revelation. It is enforced by every page of divine truth; and by every dictate of the human conscience. In a word, on all things within and without us, that *glorious and fearful name,* JEHOVAH *our God,* is written in sunbeams. In the same clear and luminous manner is every where displayed the indispensable duty of reverencing him with that *fear of the Lord which is wisdom, and that departure from evil which is understanding.* Nor can his claims to the performance of this duty be ever relinquished.

Indeed, mankind appear, almost universally, to possess a clear conviction of the truth of this doctrine, and of the indispensable nature of this duty. In all ordinary circumstances, the worst of men acknowledge both, without hesitation; even those, who most frequently and most heinously commit the sin which the doctrine prohibits. Of this sin God seems to have established in the consciences of mankind a stronger and more uniform disapprobation, than of most others. In few cases of transgression, is there so little disagreement as in this. Almost all other sins, men labour to justify. I know not, that I have ever heard any man attempt soberly to justify profaneness of this nature. He whose tongue is still vibrating with cursing and swearing, will usually acknowledge, that this conduct is inexplicable. Arguments to prove the reality of this sin, are therefore unnecessary.

3dly. *We are guilty of this sin also, when we invoke the name of God lightly and irreverently in prayer, or without that seriousness, humility, and religious awe, which*

are indispensable to the acceptable performance of this duty.

At all times, in all circumstances, are we required to render to JEHOVAH our supreme reverence and unfeigned devotion, whenever he becomes the object of our contemplation, or our conduct. His character is always and immutably the same; infinitely great, awful, holy, and excellent. Our relation to him also is invariably the same: that of rational and dependant creatures. But especially is this reverence, and this devotion, to exist in *prayer*. In the performance of this duty, so solemn in its nature, and bringing us so near the throne of majesty and mercy, the character of God, our own inferiority, dependance, obligations, sin, guilt, danger, and infinite necessity of the divine favour and blessing, are brought up in full view, and forced home from the heart. Here, therefore, all inducements to reverential thoughts of God, and all advantages for entertaining them, are presented to the mind. To exhibit irreverence in this case, therefore, is to break over these inducements, and sottishly to neglect these advantages. God here, is not treated irreverently in the hour of inconsideration, of strong temptation, and surprising sin; but in the season of seriousness, and professed devotion. We *worship* God *acceptably*, when we worship him with *reverence and godly fear. God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence by all them that are about him.* The same spirit is in the same manner demanded in our private and secret devotions. When, therefore, the mind regards its Maker, in this act of devotion with lightness and irreverence; it is not only clear, that it is guilty of the sin forbidden in the text, and of great sin; but it is fearfully probable, when this is habitually its conduct, that it is at all times the subject of a general spirit of profanation.

4thly. *A still more heinous transgression, of the same nature, is, using the name of God irreverently in the solemn act of dedicating the soul to him in the covenant of grace.*

In this, the most solemn transaction in which man is ever concerned on this side of the grave, all things, even some which are not applicable to the taking of an oath, or the

duty of prayer, conspire, in the highest degree, to make it affecting to the mind. The day, the place, the occasion, the transaction, are invested with peculiar solemnity by their very nature. A pre-eminent solemnity also is thrown upon this transaction by the character of the person immediately concerned; a sinner, professedly restored to the divine favour: the subject of dedication; an immortal mind: the Being to whom the dedication is made; a pardoning God: the means by which the worshipper has been permitted thus to dedicate himself; the righteousness of the Redeemer: the ends for which he thus offers himself up; the glory of God, and his own eternal salvation. All these things united, plainly render this the most interesting transaction in which the soul is ever engaged in the present world. To act lightly and irreverently then, in a concern so solemn, so eminently affecting, is to be profane against all inducements to our duty: against some, not existing in any other religious service. In this conduct, all these most sacred things; God, Christ, the work of redemption, forgiving love, the sabbath, the sanctuary, the restoration and salvation of the soul, are, if it be done deliberately, and with understanding, treated with the grossest contempt, and the most impious mockery. In deliberate conduct of this nature, the mind proves itself to be depraved altogether beyond the common measure; and the *conscience* is evidently not far from being *seared, as with a hot iron.*

Generally, he who regards God with levity and irreverence, in any religious service whatever, when this irreverence is directed immediately towards his character, is guilty of profaneness, in the mode specified under the second head. In other words, he is guilty of profaneness, of the same nature, and existing substantially under the same form, with that which is found in *profane cursing and swearing.* The irreverence which constitutes the peculiar guilt of this latter sin, exists also in the former: and in both is immediately directed against God himself. Both, therefore, are justly considered as cases of the same nature.

As this sin respects the *works* of God; or, in other words, *whatever he has done, declared,* or *instituted;* the profaneness, whenever it exists, is exactly the same in its nature, but different in the mode of its existence, from that

exhibited under the former *general head.* In all instances, included under that head, it is directed against God *immediately;* but *mediately* in those now referred to: the irreverence being pointed *immediately against the works themselves,* and *through them against their Author.*

God is often treated with irreverence,

1st. *In the works of creation and providence.*

The works of creation and providence are merely manifestations of their Author. In all of them, his character is more or less visible; his wisdom, power, and goodness; his self-existence, and independence; his omnipresence, and omnipotence; his omniscience, and immutability. These perfections are so clearly and so extensively manifested in his works, that, without more than common stupidity, we cannot be ignorant of them. Of consequence, we clearly perceive them to be the works of God: and whenever we complain of them, or murmur at them, or despise them, or ridicule them; the complaints, the murmurs, the contempt, and the ridicule, are intended ultimately, not against the works themselves, but against their Author. No man ever thought of treating in this manner inanimate objects, or mere events. He who made these objects, and controls these events, is the only being against whom the irreverence is intentionally directed. This is so obviously true, that probably it was never seriously questioned.

The same sin is committed, in the same manner, whenever we assert or insinuate, that these works were made to no end; or to no end worthy of their Author. In such a case the character of God is profanely impeached through his works; because we accuse him of weakness and folly. No folly can be more conspicuous, than that which is visible in doing any thing, and especially very great things, without any end in view, or without any such end as is suited to the splendour of the apparatus, or the character of the workman. Of this folly in the case before us we accuse God.

Profaneness, of an exactly similar nature, is practised, when, in considering the works of God, we intentionally or negligently *keep his agency out of view,* and attribute to second causes that which plainly belongs to the first cause

There are philosophers, and ever have been, who, through choice or carelessness, have considered the beings and events in the earth and the visible heavens, as proceeding in a manner, and from a cause, resembling that which the heathen attributed to *fate*. Instead of supposing them to be all directed by an intelligent cause to purposes formed by unerring wisdom, and conducted regularly by that wisdom to the accomplishment of those purposes; they are regarded and spoken of, as operating of themselves only; without any direction; without any end to be accomplished; without any wisdom to guide, or intelligent agency to control.

The works of God were by him intended to be, and are in fact, manifestations of himself; proofs of his character, presence, and agency. In this light he requires men continually to regard them; and to refuse this regard is considered by him as grossly wicked, and highly deserving of punishment. Accordingly David says, Psalm xxviii. 5, *Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.* Isaiah also, chap. v. 12—14, speaking of the Jews, says, *They regard not the work of the Lord; neither consider the operation of his hands. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it.*

I am apprehensive, that even good men are prone to pay less attention to the works of creation and providence, than piety demands, and the Scriptures require. We say and hear so much concerning the insufficiency of these works to unfold the character of God, and the nature of genuine religion; and find the truth of what we thus say and hear so clearly proved; that we are prone, not very unnaturally, to consider them as almost uninstructive in moral things, and in a great measure useless to the promotion of piety. This however is a palpable and dangerous error. The works *alone*, without the aid of the Scriptures, would, I acknowledge, be far less instructive than they now are, and

utterly insufficient to guide us in the way of righteousness. The Scriptures were designed to be a comment on these works; to explain their nature; and to shew us the agency, purposes, wisdom, and goodness, of God in their formation. Thus explained, thus illumined, they become means of knowledge, very extensive and eminently useful. He who does not find in the various, beautiful, sublime, awful, and astonishing objects, presented to us in creation and providence, irresistible and glorious reasons for admiring, adoring, loving, and praising, his Creator, has not a claim to evangelical piety. David did not act in this manner. All who, like David, feel the spirit of the gospel, will, like him also, rejoice in those works in which God himself rejoices; will delight to contemplate them with wonder, reverence, and gratitude; will find God every where in the works of his hands; and passing beyond those second causes, which are merely instruments of his agency, will see every where displayed, the finger and character of the divine workman.

2dly. *The same irreverence is abundantly exercised towards the word of God.*

Irreverence, in this particular, exists in a multitude of forms and degrees; altogether too numerous to be mentioned on this occasion. I shall select a few from this number.

First; *The Scriptures are not unfrequently made the object or the means of sporting and jesting.* David says of himself, *My heart standeth in awe at thy word:* and again, addressing his Maker, *O how sweet are thy words unto my taste!* God, speaking by the prophet Isaiah, says, *To this man will I look; even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word. Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word. He shall appear to your joy; and your brethren that hated you shall be ashamed.*

Such is the character of good men; and such are the promises of those *who tremble at the word of God.* But how different is the spirit of those who jest with the sacred and awful volume; who can find sport and merriment in the book, which unfolds the infinitely great, solemn, and awful character of Jehovah; which denounces his wrath against all the workers of iniquity; which opens to our view the Redeemer of mankind on the cross; which discloses to us

all the glories of heaven, and the straight and narrow way to that happy world; which presents to us the terrors of hell, with the dreadful road that leads to final perdition; and which shews us ourselves as objects of the divine indignation, in imminent danger of endless ruin, and yet as prisoners of hope and candidates for life eternal! What can be found here, to excite diversion; to become the theme of gaiety, the subject of laughter, the foundation of amusement and trifling? What must be the spirit of him, who can divert himself over the grave; who can make death the topic of wit; who can laugh before the bar of the final judgment, and sport with the miseries of perdition! He must indeed *have forgotten the God that made him, and lightly esteem the Rock of his salvation.*

Secondly; *The same irreverence is exercised, when the Scriptures are neglected. Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.* Psalm cxxxviii. 2. This passage is thus paraphrased by Dr. Watts:

> "I'll sing thy truth and mercy, Lord:
> I'll sing the wonders of thy word:
> Not all thy works and names below,
> So much thy power and glory shew."

If God then has magnified his word in this manner; if he has rendered it the means of displaying his character so much more perfectly than the works of creation and providence; if he has thus rendered it immensely important to mankind; if he himself appears in it so immediately, so clearly, and so gloriously; how inexcusable must we be, if we do not regard it with the solemn concern, the deep attention, and the profound reverence, due to his infinite majesty? But negligence of the Scriptures is the absolute prevention, the certain death, of all such emotions. What veneration can he possess for the Bible, or for the Author of it, who leaves it to moulder on a shelf; or who reads it, when he reads it at all, with carelessness and stupidity; who is equally regardless of its doctrines and its precepts; and who renders to it universally less respect than to a novel, or a play?

Thirdly; *The same irreverence is exercised towards the Scriptures, when we do not duly respect their authority.*

When the Scriptures are acknowledged to be the word of God, an end is put to all questions concerning the truth of their doctrines, and the reasonableness of their precepts. If they are *his* word; every thing contained in them, unless it be some error of a transcriber or printer, is true and right. Nor is this all. As *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God;* so he has declared the whole to be *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.* As they are, he has declared, that they are the genuine means of *perfecting the man of God,* and of *furnishing him thoroughly unto every good work.* The plain duty of all men, therefore, is carefully to understand, implicitly to believe, and exactly to obey, them. If then we find some doctrines partially revealed; some mysterious and inexplicable in their nature; and these or others contradicting our own preconceived opinions: if we doubt or disbelieve such doctrines, because our own philosophy is unsatisfied with them, opposed to them, or unable to explain them: we wholly fail of the reverence due to him who has declared them; and, in a manner highly affrontive, to impeach his wisdom and veracity.

The *Bereans received the word* preached by the apostles *with all readiness of mind:* and, to be satisfied whether it was true, did not appeal to their own reason, but to *the Scriptures,* which they *searched daily,* for this end. All who possess the liberal and noble-minded disposition ascribed to them, will pursue exactly the same conduct; and will say with St. Paul, *Let God be true, but every man a liar.* It was from this disposition that they *believed,* in the evangelical sense, and were saved. All who possess the same spirit, will share in the same faith, and the same salvation. What can be more preposterous, more indecent, more irreverential to God, than for beings *of yesterday, who know nothing,* to question the wisdom and the truth of his declarations; and instead of believing what he has said upon the ground of his veracity, to insist on perceiving, before we give credit to it, the truth and reasonableness of the doctrines declared, by means of our own philosophy. To men whose sincerity we consider as proved, we readily yield our belief, whenever they declare such things as they had opportunity certainly to know. God knows all things

with absolute certainty. Ought he not then to be believed, in whatever he is pleased to declare? Is not his veracity greater than that of men? *If* then *we receive the witness of men, the witness of God,* saith St. John, *is greater. He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar.* What wonderful irreverence is this towards God! What an impudent insult! How tremendous a profanation of his glorious character!

Fourthly; *Of the same nature is the contempt, obloquy, and ridicule, often cast upon the Scriptures.* The Scriptures, in instances not very unfrequent, receive this treatment from those who professedly believe them; and much more frequently from infidels. A man who has not hitherto seen sufficient evidence to prove the divine origin of the Scriptures, may be fairly considered as warranted to withhold from them his assent. At the same time, he is indispensably bound to investigate this evidence as fast and as far as he is able; and to yield himself to it, whenever it is perceived, with candour and equity. But nothing can justify, or even palliate, the manner in which infidels have conducted their opposition to this book. There is no mode of attack which they have thought too gross to be adopted in this warfare. The frauds which they have practised upon Christianity, have been without number and without limits. All the weakness, folly, superstition, and enthusiasm, inherent in the nature of man, they have charged upon its doctrines; although these very doctrines contradict and condemn them all. All the vices inwoven in the human character; all the enormities perpetrated by the pride, injustice, and cruelty, of man; they have charged upon its precepts; notwithstanding these very precepts prohibit every one of them, and threaten them universally with endless punishment. The religion itself they have regularly styled superstition, enthusiasm, and fanaticism; and have thus endeavoured to prepossess, and to a vast extent have actually prepossessed, great multitudes of mankind against it, under the mere influence of nicknames. Where they could not convince or refute an evil which has universally attended their efforts, they have succeeded, at least equally well, by perplexing and entangling. Instead of open, direct arguments, fairly stated, and fully discussed,

they have insinuated doubts; started difficulties; and hinted objections; leaving the minds of the young, the ignorant, and the unskilful, to embarrass themselves by dwelling upon these subjects, which they had neither learning to investigate, nor capacity to understand. In this situation, such minds are as effectually overthrown, from a consciousness of their inability to defend themselves, as by the power of an acknowledged demonstration.

What they have been unable to effect in these modes, they have endeavoured to accomplish by wit. A book, professing to be the word of God, to communicate his will to mankind, and to disclose eternal life, and eternal death, to every human being, together with the terms and means by which one of these may be obtained, and the other must be suffered; a book, believed truly to sustain this character by a great part of those to whom it has been fairly published; particularly by most of the learned, and by almost all whom their fellow-men have regarded as wise and virtuous; has unquestionable claims to be examined with solemn thought and unbiassed investigation. The question concerning its divine origin, is of infinite moment to every child of Adam. He who can sport with this subject, would with the same propriety laugh while he heard the sentence of death pronounced upon him; and dance around the grave which was dug to receive him. Suppose the Scriptures are in fact the word of God: suppose the infidel at the foot of Mount Sinai: suppose he heard the trumpet sound, and the thunders roll; saw the lightnings blaze, the cloud embosom the mountain, and the flame of devouring fire reach the heavens; and perceived the earth to tremble beneath his feet; suppose the final day arrived, and the same infidel to hear the call of the archangel, the trump of God, and the shout of the heavenly host; and to see the graves open, the dead arise, the Judge descend, the plains and the mountains kindled with the final conflagration, and the *heavens and the earth flee away:* would he be inclined to jesting, to sport, and to ridicule? The Scriptures declare themselves to be the word of the glorious Being who spoke from Sinai, and who will again come to judge *the quick and the dead.* The very terms by which the infidel and all his fellow-men will be tried on this dreadful day, the Scriptures profess to

unfold; the very terms on which, to us, are suspended both heaven and hell. Should the Scriptures be indeed the word of that God, what will become of the infidel? Should they not, what will he lose by believing them? Where then is the place for his sport? where the foundation for his trifling?

Could the contempt or the ridicule which he employs really affect the question, and exhibit it in any new light to the understanding of man; something at least might be pleaded in extenuation of this conduct. But ridicule, however gross the banter, or refined the wit, cannot be proof. A sneer cannot be an argument. The question, after every effort of this nature, is left just where it was; while the inquirer is insnared, deceived, and ruined. How melancholy an employment, to destroy a soul for the sake of uttering a jest!

To complete this wretched pursuit of this wretched purpose, the infidel assaults the Scriptures with obscenity. In periods and places in which coarse manners prevail; when the animal side of man is left naked; and the feelings and conduct of the brute obtrude themselves without a blush; this obscenity breaks out in gross ribaldry, and the shameless dialect of the workhouse and the brothel. In more chastened society, the impurity, lest it should be too offensive, is veiled by decency of expression; steals upon the mind in an inuendo; glances at it in a hint, and peeps from behind an obscure suggestion. What a shocking mixture is here presented to the thoughts of a sober, and even of a decent man! Obscenity, blended with the truths contained in the word of God. How obviously must the mind, which can voluntarily, which can laboriously, unite these things, be *the habitation of devils; the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird!* How irreverent, how profane, *how abominable,* how *filthy,* must it appear to him, *in whose sight the heavens are unclean!*

3dly. *This irreverence is perhaps not less exercised towards the institutions or ordinances of God.*

God has instituted, as important means of displaying his own character, preserving his worship, and promoting his religion in the world, the sabbath; public and private prayer and praise; the preaching of the gospel; public and

private humiliation and fasting; the church of Christ; its communion; its sacraments; and its discipline. As all these are his institutions, and seem to be his; it is obvious, that irreverence towards *them* is irreverence towards *himself;* and in this manner has the subject ever been considered in the Christian world. It will be easily seen, that the various ways in which this numerous train of sacred things is profaned, are so many, as to render it impracticable to specify them on the present occasion. I shall therefore attempt only to mention such as are most usual, or most prominent.

The sabbath is undoubtedly the great support of religion in the world; for wherever it is unknown, or unregarded, religion is unknown. Accordingly God has been pleased to make it the subject of one of the commands of the decalogue. This holy day is profaned, and the Author of it treated with gross irreverence, whenever it is devoted to pleasure, or to secular business: whenever we ride or walk, when neither necessity nor mercy demands: whenever we read books of amusement and diversion; or devote our conversation to any topics unsuited to the holy nature of this day. Nor is it less really profaned, when we spend its sacred hours in idleness, or sleep; or when, in any other manner, we refuse or neglect to employ them in the great duties of religion. Equally, and more obviously, are we guilty of this profanation, when we speak of the sabbath with contempt; and ridicule or laugh at others for regarding it with reverence enjoined in the Scriptures; decry the institution, as useless, as injurious to the interests of mankind; and as deserving the regard of none but weak and enthusiastic minds: or when, with direct hostility, we deny its sacred nature; labour to weaken its authority; and endeavour to destroy its holy, heavenly influence on mankind. In all these cases, we impeach the wisdom, equity, or goodness, of its Author; declare himself when instituting it, to have acted unworthily of himself; and, in plain language, cast contempt on *him*, as well as on his *institution*. No man ever thought of treating with contempt this holy day, considered merely as a seventh part of time: no man ever directed the shafts of ridicule at Monday. Aside from the fact, that it was instituted by God as a sa-

cred day, the sabbath would be no more despised, and regarded with no more hostility, than any other day of the week. The hostility and contempt, therefore, are directed against the institution; against its sacred nature; against its holy and glorious Author.

The worship of God is profaned, whenever, for reasons plainly insufficient, we refuse to be present in his house upon the sabbath; or, when present, neglect cordially to unite in its solemn services; or spend the time allotted to them in sleep or diversion; or when we sport with the services themselves; or when our minds rise in hostility against the faithful preaching of the gospel; or when we make the worship of God an object of our scorn and ridicule. Nor are we less really guilty of this crime, whenever we allure or persuade others to the same conduct. The worship of God was designed to be the great means of leading us to eternal life. God appears in it as a forgiving God; as a God reconcilable to sinners; as redeeming them from under the curse of the law; and as reinstamping his own image on their minds. He who will not come to meet him, when appearing in this most venerable and endearing of all characters, or who, when he has come, will treat him with neglect, opposition, and contempt, is guilty of an insult on the Creator, at which the stoutest heart ought to tremble. What an account of this conduct must he expect to give at the final day?

The Christian sacraments are not often openly profaned. The elements employed have indeed been touched with unhallowed hands; and the ordinances themselves have, in solitary instances, been insulted by blasphemous mimicry. But the cases have been so rare, and have been regarded by those who knew them with such abhorrence, as scarcely to need any reprobation from me. I shall therefore only say, that according to the first feelings of the human mind, feelings which seem never to have been materially weakened, unless by absolute profligacy, they are universally held in the most reverential estimation; and all disregard, thoughtlessness, and levity, are not only by the Scriptures, but by common sense also, proscribed in our attendance upon them. If we are not wonderfully insensible, we cannot fail of exercising a profound reverence, when in this pecu-

liarly solemn and affecting manner we draw so near to a forgiving God.

Private and secret worship is much more frequently the object of levity and contempt. Family prayer peculiarly has been attacked, on all sides, by loose and light-minded men; and, I doubt not, has been hunted out of many a family, and prevented from entering many others, by the sneers of scorn, and the jests of derision. Why should not men pray? Why should not families pray? Are we not dependant creatures? Do we not need every thing at the hand of God? Who beside God can supply our wants? Has he not required us to pray? If we do not pray, will he bless us? Has he not made *asking* the indispensable condition of *receiving*. The *man* who will not pray is a madman. The *family* which will not pray are lunatics.

God has required us to *pray always with all prayer;* and, therefore, to perform regularly the duties of both private and secret devotion. When we ourselves neglect either; or when we oppose the performance of them in our fellow-men; we neglect or oppose the command of JEHOVAH. He who laughs and sneers at secret and family prayer, points his jests, his contempt, and his mockery, against his Creator. Where can folly or frenzy be found, more absolute than this? The wretch who is guilty of it, is a helpless, sinful, miserable, creature; dependant for existence, for enjoyment, and for hope, on the mere sovereign mercy of God; is promised all blessings which he needs, if he will pray for them; and is assured, that if he will not pray, he not only will be entitled to no blessings whatever, but that those which he regards as blessings, and which, if he faithfully performed this duty, would prove such, will be converted into curses. This wretch not only refuses to pray himself, but with gross impiety insults his Maker anew, by preventing his fellow-men from praying also.

I shall only add, that *irreverence, the same in substance with that which has been here specified,* may exist in *thought, and in action,* as well as *in words.* In some of the cases which I have mentioned, it has been indeed supposed to terminate in thought. It may thus terminate in all cases which do not involve our intercourse with our fellow-men. In this intercourse it may be exhibited in actions; and

those of very various kinds. Of these very few have been mentioned. It is only necessary to observe, that, whenever our hearts teem with irreverent thoughts towards God, or towards any thing because it is his, it makes little difference, whether we express our impiety by the tongue, or by the hands. The irreverence is the same: the design is the same: the moral action is the same. It is the rising of pride, enmity, and rebellion, against God; the openi mpudent contention of a creature against his Creator; the struggle, the swelling, the writhing, of a worm against JEHOVAH.

SERMON CIII.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE DECALOGUE. THE THIRD COMMANDMENT. THE GUILT OF PROFANENESS.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain.—EXOD. XX. 7.

IN the preceding discourse I proposed, after making several introductory remarks, to examine,

I. *The nature;*

II. *The guilt;* and,

III. *The danger; of sin, forbidden in this command.*

The first of these I considered at length in that discourse. I shall now proceed to make some observations concerning the second; viz. *the guilt of this sin.* The guilt of this sin is evident,

1st. *From the tenor of the command.*

Profaneness is one of the eight great crimes which God thought proper to make the express subjects of prohibition in the decalogue. In the order in which he was pleased to speak and to write them, it holds *the third place.* All the importance which this wonderful law derived from being

uttered by the voice, and being written with the finger, of God; from his manifest appearance in this lower world; and from the awful splendour and amazing majesty with which he appeared; this precept, equally with the others, challenges to itself. In addition to these things, it is the only precept in the whole number which annexes an express threatening to the crime which is prohibited. From all these circumstances it is abundantly evident, that the guilt of this sin is of no common die in the sight of JEHOVAH. All these circumstances were intended to be significant, and are obviously significant in a manner pre-eminently solemn and affecting. How should we ourselves feel, if the Creator of the universe were to inform us by the mouth of an acknowledged prophet, that he would appear in this world on an appointed day, to publish his awful pleasure to mankind! With what anxious, trembling expectation should we wait for the destined period! With what solemnity and apprehension should we behold the day dawn! With what silent awe should we see the cloudy chariot descend; and hear the archangel proclaim the approach of his Maker! How should we shudder at the sound of the trumpet, and the quaking of the earth! Would not our *hearts die within us*, when the thunders began to roll; the lightnings to blaze; and *the flames of devouring fire* to rise up to the heavens! In the midst of these tremendous scenes, with what silent, deathlike amazement should we listen, to hear the voice of the Almighty! Would it not seem wonderful; would it not appear delirious; for any man to call in question the authority of his commands, or the absolute rectitude of his pleasure; to refuse the duties which he enjoined, or to perpetrate the crimes which he forbade? Who after hearing from the mouth of God the awful prohibition, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;* and the fearful threatening annexed to it, *for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, who taketh his name in vain;* would not quake with terror at the very thought of committing a sin thus alarmingly forbidden? Who would demand an argument to convince him, that such a sin was eminently evil in the sight of his Maker?

2dly. *This sin is an immediate attack on God himself, and is therefore peculiarly guilty.*

The hostilities of mankind against any intelligent being may be carried on *mediately*, or *immediately: mediately*, against his *property*, if he be a human being, or against *his other external interests: immediately*, against his *character and person*. In the same manner we may attack our Maker by attacking our fellow-creatures; and violating such commands of his, as regulate our duties to *them;* appropriately and usually styled *the duties of morality*. Or we may attack him immediately, by violating those commands which respect his person and character, and enjoin the various duties of piety. All the transgressions which I have recited, are directed against objects confessedly belonging to God, and known to be *his* in immediate possession: his name, his titles, his works, his word, and his institutions. As *his* only, do they become the objects of irreverence at all. In all these cases therefore, as here described, we attack God in the most direct manner which is in our power. A king or a parent may be insulted by an affront offered immediately to his officer; his messenger: or any other acting under his authority. No person will deny the affront here to be real; nor, as the case may be, to be very serious. Still it was probably never questioned, that when this same affront was offered directly to the parent, or the king himself, it became far more gross; an insult of greater magnitude, and greater guilt. Accordingly, such affronts have been always more seriously resented, and more severely punished.

In all the cases mentioned in the preceding discourse, God is necessarily, and most solemnly, present to the mind of man. Whatever impiety therefore, whatever irreverence, whatever profaneness, is exhibited in these cases, is directed immediately against him; against his character; against his person. He who is the subject of it, *stretcheth out his hand against God; and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty. He runneth on him, even on his neck; upon the thick bosses of his bucklers.* How can the man, who is summoned to take a solemn oath, who is employed in the eminently solemn duty of prayer, or in the pre-eminently solemn duty of dedicating himself to God in the covenant of peace, fail to have a lively and affecting sense of the presence of his Maker! How can he fail to realize, that all

the levity, thoughtlessness, insincerity, and irreverence, of which he is guilty, is levelled directly against God? Who else is, who else can be, the object of this conduct? Who else is concerned with it? Whose name is here mocked? Whose institutions are set at nought? If the criminal be weak enough to suspect, that he is not in this case trifling with his Maker; and wickedly profaning his glorious name; he is probably the only being in the universe sufficiently bewildered to adopt this unsound and unhappy opinion.

What is true of these acts of worship, is true, with little variation, of every other.

In that light-minded use of the names and titles of God, which is appropriately called profaneness, the circumstances are, I acknowledge, in some respects, materially different. It seems wonderful indeed, that, whenever the name of God is mentioned, any mind should not be filled with awe, and affectingly realize the presence of this majestic Being. The Jews would not pronounce the incommunicable name JEHOVAH, except in one peculiarly solemn act of religious worship. Such of the Mohammedans as cannot read, carefully lay aside any written or printed paper, because they know not, but it may have upon it the name of God. But in this and every other Christian country, there is no reason to fear, that multitudes, and probably that most or all those who are habitually profane, use *this glorious and fearful name* without even a thought, that God is present to hear them.

In his own proper character of the *glorious and eternal* JEHOVAH, *who hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and whose kingdom ruleth over all,* it is impossible to regard him with serious, or with even sober thought, and not be filled with profound and reverential awe. It is impossible to realize who, and what, and where, HE IS, and not be filled with fear and trembling. He called into being the heavens and the earth; *upholds them by the word of his power;* rules them with an irresistible hand; gives life and death to whomsoever he pleases; is present wherever we are; looks with an intuitive survey into the secret chambers of the soul; records all our thoughts, words, and actions in the book of his remembrance; and will bring

them before our eyes at the final day. On his bounty and forbearance we live. When he gives, we receive. When he withholds, we die. His smile makes heaven: his frown creates hell. Those who fear, and love, and serve him, he will bless: those who rebel against him, he will destroy. Who then, unless lost to sense and decency, will not *tremble at his presence*, and lie low in the dust before him?

But in this deplorable transgression, the profane swearer brings God into his thoughts (if he think at all), and into his conversation, with a character altogether familiar, and with considerations and views of the most debasing vulgarity. The same man, when in the presence of his fellow-men acknowledged by him to be of respectable characters, would set a guard on his conduct; particularly on his tongue; and would speak of them, and to them, and before them, with sobriety, care, and decorum; and would watchfully give them every reasonable proof, that he regarded them only with respect. From this decency in civilized life, a departure can scarcely be found; unless under the influence of strong passion, or pressing interest.

Surely the Creator of all things has as powerful claims to veneration, as the worm which he has made. But notwithstanding his glorious and awful character, notwithstanding we know, that he is present to all our conduct; notwithstanding we know, that he hears whatever we say, and sees whatever we think or do; we make this great and terrible Being the subject of the most irreverential, impudent thoughts, and of the most vulgar, affrontive, contemptuous language. Nay, all this is done by the profane person, for no purpose but to affront and insult him; and to induce others to affront and insult him also.

All this is done, not once, twice, or in a few solitary instances only; not in the season of forgetfulness, the unguarded hour of passion, or the moment of peculiar temptation merely; but every day, in every place, and on every familiar occasion. In *this* manner, God is *habitually* brought up to view, and *continually* insulted. Thus familiarized, thus habituated, to such thoughts, and to such language, the profane person soon becomes unable to think or speak concerning his Maker in any other manner. All his thoughts concerning him become a regular *course* of irreverence,

and all his language a tissue of impudence and insult. God, the great and terrible God, *in whose hand his breath is; in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being;* the God, by whom he is soon to be judged and rewarded with endless life or endless death; becomes speedily to him a mere object of vulgar abuse and gross derision. With what views must this awful Being regard the miserable wretch who thus degrades his character? What must be the appearance of this wretch at the final day?

From God, the source and substance of every thing sacred, the transition to all other sacred things is easy; and, in a sense, instinctive. From him religion derives its existence, its obligation, its power, its hopes, and its rewards. Separated from him, there can be no piety. Separated from him, there can be no morality. Who does not see, that without God there could be no Bible, no sabbath, no worship, no holiness, and no heaven. He therefore who is accustomed to profane the name of God, cuts off his connexion with all things serious and sacred. But nothing else is comparatively of any use to man. Whatever is gay and amusing, and at the same time innocent, and in some sense useful, is useful only to refresh the mind for a more vigorous application to things of a serious and sacred nature. In these lie all the real and substantial interests of man; the foundations of a virtuous, useful, and happy life, and a glorious immortality. To lose our connexion with them, therefore, is to lose our all. Of course, the profane person voluntarily squanders the blessings of time and eternity; and with a portentous prodigality makes himself *poor, and wretched, and miserable;* a nuisance to the world, and an outcast from heaven.

3dly. *Profaneness is, in most instances, a violation of peculiarly clear, and peculiarly solemn, inducements to our duty.*

I have already remarked, under the preceding head, that in many of the cases specified in the former discourse, it is impossible that the presence and character of God should not be realized by the profane person. But the character and presence of God united, present to every mind, not wholly destitute of sobriety, a combination of the most solemn and powerful motives to the performance of its duty.

The Being by whom we were created, and on whom we depend for life, together with all its blessings and hopes, who *will bring every work, with every secret thing, into judgment,* and *who will reward every man according to the deeds done in the body,* with a retribution final and endless, is an object so awful, so interesting, so overwhelming, that one would naturally think no sacrifice too great, no duty too difficult or discouraging, if the performance would secure his favour.

To the considerations which have been here mentioned, others of singular importance are always to be added, when we are examining almost all the cases of profaneness specified in the preceding discourse. In the *word and institutions of God,* and in all the *religious services rendered to him according to the dictates of the gospel,* he is presented to us as the Father, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier, of mankind, in the most endearing and venerable of all offices; the offices of accomplishing an expiation for sin, renewing the soul, pardoning its transgressions, and entitling it again to the blessings of infinite love. These blessings, literally infinite, flowing only from the sovereign and boundless mercy of JEHOVAH, are proffered to a mind apostatized, rebellious, and ruined; a mind incapable of renewing itself, and therefore, if left to itself, hopeless of the divine favour; and an outcast from the virtuous and happy universe. In such a situation, how deeply should we naturally suppose it must be affected with a sense of the infinite goodness engaged so wonderfully in its behalf; by the glorious blessings proffered to its acceptance; and by its own infinite need of a share in these blessings. If it will not be influenced by the presence of JEHOVAH, appearing in these amiable and wonderful characters; if it will not be moved by the proffer of these invaluable and immortal blessings; what inducements can persuade it to perform its duty? If the pleasure of such a God, if the attainment of such a salvation, will not lay hold on the heart; where shall we look for motives of sufficient weight to engage its obedience?

But the profane person does not merely *disobey,* as we commonly understand this term: *he disobeys in the most provoking manner.* He treats his Maker as the Jews treated

Christ. They did not merely reject this divine Saviour. They did not merely crucify him. They rejected him with scorn, they crucified him with insult. Thorns they gave him for a crown, and a reed for a sceptre. The respect which they professedly paid him, was contempt; and the homage, mockery. Such, for substance, is the manner in which the profane person treats his God. With all the solemn inducements which have been mentioned before his eyes, he not only rejects this glorious Being, and his benevolent offers of eternal life to perishing sinners; but accompanies his rejection with irreverence, despite, and insolence; and cries, Who is the Almighty that I should serve him? If the *ways* of God were not *higher than our ways, as the heavens are higher than the earth:* what would become of this audacious, miserable being?

4thly. *Profaneness is a sin to which there is scarcely any temptation.*

In the commission of most sins, mankind usually expect and believe they shall obtain some natural good; and this is almost always the prime object of their sinful pursuit: good, forbidden indeed, and therefore unlawful; yet still really good in the apprehension of the sinner. Thus persons commonly lie and cheat for the sake of some gain; become intoxicated, on account of the pleasure experienced in the use of strong drink; are gluttons, to enjoy the delightful taste of dainty food; and thus in almost all other cases of transgression.

But in profaneness there seems to be no good, either enjoyed or expected, beside that which is found in the mere love and indulgence of sin. No person ever acquired property, health, reputation, place, power, nor, it would seem, pleasure, from profaneness. Those particular movements of the tongue which articulate profaneness produce, so far as I am able to conjecture, no more agreeable sensations than any other. The words which embody profane thoughts, are neither smoother nor sweeter than any other words. If then profaneness were not sinful, such words would be pronounced no oftener than any other. The pleasure found in profaneness, such as it is, is therefore found, chiefly if not wholly, in the wickedness which it involves and expresses. The *sin* is the good; and not any thing peculiar

to the manner in which it is committed; nor any thing which the profaneness is expected to be the means of acquiring. It may be said, that the profane person recommends himself to his companions; persons with whom he is pleased, and whom he wishes to please; and that, at the same time, he secures himself from their contempt and ridicule; to which otherwise he would be exposed. This without doubt is partially true; and comes nearer than any thing else which can be alleged to a seeming exception to the justice of the remark under consideration. Yet it is hardly a seeming exception. Nothing but *the wickedness of this conduct* recommends the profane person to his companions; and those to whom he is recommended are sinners only. But for the love of wickedness in *them*, he could not become agreeable to them by this evil practice: and but for the love of wickedness in *him*, he could not wish to be thus agreeable. Can it then be good; can it be gainful; will it be alleged to be gain: to recommend ourselves to *sinners* by the perpetration of *sin?* Is not the end which we propose; are not the means which we use; altogether disgraceful both to ourselves and them; instead of being beneficial to either, are they not the means of corruption and ruin to both? Is the favour of men who love sin; and so ardently love it, as to love us merely for sinning; desirable, or useful to us? Is it worth our labour? Does it deserve our wishes; Can it prove a balance for the guilt which we incur? Can it be of any value to us, although in desiring and obtaining it we were to incur no guilt?

But the profane person *is not esteemed*, even by his sinful companions. They may desire him as an associate; and they may relish his wickedness; but they approve of neither. Such persons have repeatedly declared to me, that they approved neither of themselves nor others when guilty of this sin; but regarded it as a stain upon the character of both. The companions of such a man may be pleased with *him* and *his wickedness;* because both may contribute to keep them in countenance; or make them diversion. They may wish to see him as bad or worse than themselves, that the deep hues of their own guilt may fade at his side. Still they will make him, when he is not

present, an object of their contempt and derision. In the same manner men love treason and treachery; and in this manner also despise the traitor. If the profane person will take pains to learn the real opinion of his companions; he will find that they invariably condemn his character on the one hand, and on the other hold it in contempt. In the mean time, he exposes himself uniformly to the abhorrence of virtuous and even of sober men. Of this no proof is necessary. The experience of every day informs us, that profane persons are a kind of *Helots* in society: men, whom youth are admonished to dread and avoid: men pointed out to children as warnings against iniquity: branded as nuisances to society; and marked as blots upon the creation of God.

Virtue is acknowledged to be distinguished and excellent, in some general proportion at least, to the *disinterestedness* with which it is exercised. Sin, committed without motives of such magnitude as to be properly styled temptations, may be justly termed *disinterested sin:* sin committed only from the love of sin, and not with a view to any natural good in which it is to terminate. This must undoubtedly be acknowledged to be wickedness of a die peculiarly deep, of a nature eminently guilty; and the author of it must, with as little doubt, be eminently vile, odious, and abominable, in the sight of God.

5thly. *Profaneness is among the most distinguished means of corrupting our fellow-men.*

This observation I intend to apply exclusively to the profaneness of the tongue. It is indeed applicable, with much force, to profaneness manifested in various kinds of action; but it is peculiarly applicable to the kind of profaneness which I have particularly specified.

Sins of the tongue are all social sins; necessarily social, and eminently social. They are practised only when men are present to hear, and to witness; and they are practised wherever men are present to hear. Thus a man is profane before his family; swears, and curses, and ridicules sacred things, in the social club; in the street; before his neighbours; and in the midst of a multitude. Persons of all ages become witnesses and learners. Thus children learn to lisp the curse; and the gray-haired sinner to mutter the faltering oath.

No man was ever profane alone; in a wilderness, or in his closet. To the very nature of this sin, the presence of others seems so indispensable, that we cannot realize the commission of it by any man, unless in the midst of society. All the mischief of evil example is found in the social nature of man; and in the social nature of those sins to which the whole power of evil example is confined. Where sin is in its nature solitary, and the perpetration of course insulated; whatever other guilt it may involve, the sinner plainly cannot be charged with the guilt of corrupting others. In order to follow *us* in wickedness, *others* must know that we are wicked. When they hear of our wickedness at a distance; they are always perhaps in greater or less danger of being corrupted; because sympathy is always a powerful propensity of the mind, and because we have always a strong tendency to imitation. But when they are present to see sin in our actions, and to hear it from our tongues; it becomes the means of the most certain and efficacious corruption; because then the impression is ordinarily the strongest possible.

There is, however, one case, in which this corruption, though usually less efficacious in particular instances, is yet much more dreadfully oporative, because it is much more extensively diffused. An author, when possessed of sufficient ingenuity, can spread this malignant influence wherever his writings can penetrate; and expand the force of an evil example over many countries, and through a long succession of ages. Millions of the human race may owe to such a man the commencement and progress of iniquity in their minds; and may imbibe pernicious sentiments, which, but for him, they would have never known, or would have regarded only with abhorrence. In this respect, what will not infidels, especially those of distinguished talents, have to answer for at the final day?

But this evil may be very widely diffused without the aid of the press, or the circulation of volumes. The tongue is an instrument more than sufficiently adapted to this unhappy end. One profane person makes multitudes; corrupts his professed friends, his daily companions, his near relations, and all with whom he corresponds, so far as they are capable of being corrupted. They again corrupt others;

and they in their turn spread the contagion through successive circles of mankind, increasing continually in their numbers and their expansion. Thus a profane inhabitant of this land may extend the mischiefs of his evil example to other countries, and to future ages: and a profane student of this seminary may, and probably will, be the cause of handing down profaneness to students yet unborn.

The mischiefs of evil example are always great; in the present case they are dreadful. The tongue is obviously the prime instrument of human corruption; of diffusing and perpetuating sin; of preventing the eternal life of our fellow-men: of extending perdition over the earth; and of populating the world of misery. *Behold*, saith St. James, *how great a matter* (in the original, *how great a forest*) *a little fire kindleth!* Small at first to the eye, it catches all the combustible materials within its reach, and spreading its ravages wider and wider, consumes in the end every thing before it with a universal conflagration. Among all the evil examples which I have heard mentioned, or which have been alluded to within my knowledge, I do not remember, that a dumb man was ever named as one. No person within my recollection, ever attributed his own sins to the example of such a man. Speaking men are the corruptors of their fellow-men: and they corrupt pre-eminently by their speech. No individual ever began to swear profanely by himself: and few, very few, ever commenced the practice but from imitation. Like certain diseases of the human body, profaneness descends from person to person; and, like the plague, is regularly caught by infection. Let every profane person, then, solemnly remember how much evil will be charged to him in the great day of account: how many miserable wretches will date their peculiar sinfulness of character, and a vast multitude of their actual transgressions, from the power of his example: how many of his fellow-creatures he will contribute to plunge into eternal perdition: and how dreadfully, as well as justly, all these may wreak their insatiable vengeance on his head, for producing their final ruin: while he will be stripped of every excuse; and be forced by an angry conscience to say, Amen. Let him remember, that in this respect, if not in

many others, he is a pest to human society, and *a smoke in the nostrils* of his Maker. Finally; let him summon this character, and this guilt, before his eyes, whenever he repeats his profaneness, with a full conviction, that however he may flatter himself, all around him, as a vast and upright jury, sit daily on the trial of his crimes, and, with a unanimous and honest verdict, pronounce him guilty.

6thly. *Profaneness prevents or destroys all reverence towards God; together with all those religious exercises and their happy consequences of which it is the source.*

In the discourse which I formerly delivered on this preeminently important religious attribute, I shewed, by a numerous train of scriptural passages, that *it is peculiarly the means of rendering our worship acceptable to God; of exciting and keeping alive an abhorrence of sin; the great source of reformation; eminently the source of rectitude in our dispositions and conduct towards mankind; the foundation of peculiar blessings in the present world; and eminently the means of securing eternal life in the world to come.* These blessings, as an aggregate, are infinitely necessary, and infinitely valuable, to every human being. To prevent them, or to destroy them, that is, to prevent ourselves or others from becoming the subjects of them, is an evil to which no limits can be assigned. But this dreadful work is effectually accomplished by profaneness. Profaneness itself is nothing but a high degree of irreverence to God. But no words are necessary to prove, that reverence and irreverence cannot exist together in the same mind; or that, where reverence does not exist, its happy effects cannot be found.

It is plainly impossible, that he who indulges a spirit of profaneness, should ever worship God in an acceptable manner. The spirit once indulged, soon becomes habitual; and will be present, and predominate, at all times, and on all occasions. It will accompany him to the house of God; and if we could suppose such a man to attend private or secret devotion, would mingle itself with his family prayers, and, entering with him into his closet, would there insult his Maker to his face. But the truth is; he will neither pray in his family, nor in his closet. These exercises of piety

he will only ridicule; and regard those who scrupulously perform them, as the pitiful slaves of fear, voluntarily shackled by the chains of superstition. To the sanctuary he may at times go from curiosity, a regard to reputation, and a remaining sense of decency. There, however, all his seeming devotion will be merely external; an offering *of the blind and the lame; a sacrifice of swine's flesh; an abomination, which God cannot away with;* a dead form, a corpse without a soul; without life; corrupted; putrid; sending forth *a savour of death unto death.*

Instead of exciting and keeping alive an abhorrence of sin in his mind, the profane person, by the very irreverence which he cherishes, excites and keeps alive all his other tendencies to iniquity. God, the only object of obedience, imperfectly obeyed by the best mind which ever inhabited this sinful world, soon becomes to him, by this very disposition, familiar, insignificant, and despised. Who could obey a Being regarded in this manner? What anxiety can be occasioned by the thought of disobeying him? Who can be solicitous concerning the evil of sin, when such is in his view the object against which sin is to be committed? Which of us could be at all apprehensive of either the guilt or the danger of sinning against a Being whom we regarded only with contempt?

The reformation of a profane person is out of the question. His progress is only downward. Profaneness is the mere floodgate of iniquity; and the stream, once let out, flows with a current daily becoming more and more rapid and powerful. There is no crime to which profaneness does not lend efficacious and malignant aid. It is the very nurse of sin; the foster parent of rebellion, ingratitude, and impiety.

The unjust judge, who feared not God, regarded not man. Such will be the conduct, whenever temptation invites, of all who do not fear God. Persons of this description may, I acknowledge, have originally the same natural affections with other men. But even these, so far as they are of any real use to others, will, if I have observed the conduct of mankind with success, be gradually worn away by the spirit of irreverence; and, while they last, will fail of producing their most proper and valuable effects. A pro-

fane person cannot long pray with his family. He cannot teach his children their duty. He cannot reprove them for sin. He cannot set them an example of piety. He cannot exhort them to seek salvation. He cannot take them by the hand, and lead them to heaven.

What blessings can he expect from the hand of God in the present world? He may indeed be rich. "Oft," says the poet,

"Oft on the vilest, riches are bestowed,
To shew their meanness in the sight of God."

Should he be rich; his wealth will be a curse, and not a blessing; the means merely of increasing his pride, of hardening his heart, and of inclining him to *treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* He may, on account of his talents, his heroism, or some other cause, be held in estimation among his fellow-men. But whatever reputation he may acquire in this manner; this, like his wealth, will prove only a curse to him: for, although *highly esteemed among men,* he will be *an abomination in the sight of God.*

Beyond the grave he can expect and can receive nothing but *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish.* His profaneness is an unceasing and fearful provocation of his Maker, and a terrible preparation for a future life of eternal blasphemy. All the ruin of futurity, and all the guilt and wretchedness of this life, he voluntarily brings upon himself by the indulgence of this odious, senseless, causeless sin; and thus quietly and coolly prepares himself to be destroyed for ever. *In sinning against God,* in this manner, *he* eminently *wrongs his own soul;* and *loves,* invites, and solicits, everlasting *death.*

SERMON CIV.

THE LAW OF GOD.

THE DECALOGUE. THE THIRD COMMANDMENT. THE DANGER OF PROFANENESS.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain.—EXOD. XX. 7.

IN the two preceding discourses, I considered at length, *the nature and the guilt of profaneness.* I shall now proceed, according to the plan originally proposed, to examine with some attention *the danger* of this sin.

All sin is dangerous. But there are different kinds and degrees of danger in different sins. On those, which especially attend this sin, or which, though common to other sinful habits, are connected with profaneness in a remarkable manner, I mean to insist in the following discourse.

1st. *Profaneness is eminently the source of corruption to the whole character.*

That there is an intimate connexion between the thoughts and the tongue, is perfectly well known to all men of consideration. The nature of this connexion is however misapprehended, if I mistake not, by most men. All persons perceive, that their thoughts give birth to their words: while few seem to be aware, that their words, to a vast extent, originate and modify their thoughts. Almost all moral attributes and employments operate mutually as causes and effects. Thus irreverence of thought generates profaneness of expression; and profaneness of expression, in its turn, generates and enhances irreverence of thoughts. Thus, universally, the mind moves the tongue; and the tongue again, in its turn, moves the mind. The person who speaks evil, will always think evil. By this I do not mean, that evil *thoughts* must precede evil *speaking*; and that the man must, therefore, have been the subject of evil thoughts,

in order to have spoken evil. I mean, that evil speaking, although an effect of evil thoughts, is, in its turn, a cause of new, and other evil thoughts. He who thinks ill, will undoubtedly speak and act ill. This all man readily acknowledge. It is equally certain, although not equally well understood, that evil speech, and evil actions, directly corrupt the mind; and render it more sinful than it would ever become, if it were not to speak and act in this manner.

A familiar example or two will advantageously illustrate this subject. An angry man becomes at once more violent and wrathful, when he begins to vent his passion by words. What before was anger, soon becomes fury. Before, he was able to retain his spirit within some bounds of decency; but as soon as his tongue is let loose, his countenance will be distorted, his eyes flash, and his sentiments be the mere effusions of frenzy. A revengeful man kindles, like a furnace, from the moment in which he begins to execute his revenge. What before was the revenge of a human heart, is speedily changed into the fell malignity of a fiend.

St. James has exhibited this tendency of the tongue to corrupt the mind, in language remarkable, exact, and forcible. He styles it *an unruly member; a fire; a world of iniquity;* and declares, that *it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature.* Its influence on the mind itself, as well as on the affairs of mankind, he describes in this strong exclamation: *Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth!* That the eye of St. James was directed to *the profaneness* of the tongue, is obvious from what he says in the two succeeding verses. *Therewith bless we God; and therewith curse we men. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.* Cursing, one dreadful kind of profaneness, was, according to his own account, in the eye of the apostle, a kind of profaneness mingled always with every other, and inseparable from every other. In this very sense, then, *the tongue is full of deadly poison; a fire that kindles the whole course of nature* in the soul; and *defiles the whole body,* and the whole mind.

Of the correctness of these apostolic declarations, experience furnishes ample proof. Among all the multitude of

persons who have borne the character of profaneness, not one was ever believed, on account of his other conduct, by any competent judge acquainted with him, to be a virtuous man. Many persons have begun to be profane from mere inconsideration; and, at the commencement of their career, were no more depraved than such of their companions as abstained from this sin. In their progress, however, they became corrupted much more extensively within the same period; increased generally in wickedness, and particularly in hardness of heart; and lost every serious and even sober thought: all that course of thought, whence moral good might be derived, or whence might spring any hopeful efforts towards salvation. This is a case which must, I think, have frequently met the eye of every man who is seriously attentive to the moral conduct of his fellow-men; and strongly shews, that the practice has itself deplorably corrupted them in other respects, and sets on fire the whole course of nature in their minds and lives. Hence, instead of being accounted virtuous on account of any thing in their other conduct, persons addicted to this sin have been regarded by common sense as gross sinners of course. "*A profane person*" is therefore, as you well know, proverbial language, used regularly to denote a wicked, vicious wretch.

The truth plainly is, and all men discern it to be truth, that irreverence to God is a general source of wickedness. As I remarked in a former discourse, *religious reverence is the direct and peculiar source of reformation.* Irreverence, its opposite, is in the same manner the direct source of degeneracy. This is indeed true of most sins, when *habitually* and *allowedly* practised. He who practises one sin in this manner, will almost necessarily relish other sins more. As the body, when corrupted and weakened by sickness, is more prepared for the admission of any disease which may [illegible] the soul, corrupted by sin of any kind, becomes more fitted for the admission of every kind of wickedness which seeks admission. The conscience becomes less tender, less awake, less alarmed at the apprehension of guilt. The motives also, which should induce us to abstain from iniquity, gradually lose their power. The love of sinning, the evil passions and appetites, gain strength

by indulgence; and temptation, having repeatedly vanquished us, more easily vanquishes us again.

But irreverence, more than almost any other evil, brings us into this danger. Whenever God becomes an object of little importance or estimation in our view; the *evil* of sinning vanishes of course. The *danger* also speedily recedes from our view. The only great and solemn object in the universe, the only Being who is of ultimate importance to us, loses all his awfulness and sanctity. The great and commanding motive is therefore gone; and there is nothing left to restrain us but reputation or convenience. In this situation, the mind is prepared for future perpetration, not only by an increased love to sinning, but by a strong and habitual *feeling*, operating with much more power than mere *conviction*, that sin is neither guilty nor dangerous; or at the worst as a thing of small moment. The soul is thus left free to the indulgence of its evil propensities; and the restraints, which once operated with no small efficacy, lose their hold on the mind.

An affecting exemplification of this doctrine is seen in the tendency of one exercise of profaneness to produce another. Persons addicted to profane swearing are, I apprehend, much more prone than most others to the commission of perjury. An oath is an eminently solemn act of religious worship. The person who takes an oath, calls God to witness the manner in which he shall speak or act under the obligation which it imposes. If he shall speak truth, and nothing else; if he shall act faithfully in the office or trust which he is then assuming; he implores God to bless him here and hereafter. If he shall speak falsely, or act unfaithfully; he in the same solemn manner invokes on his head the divine vengeance through time and eternity.

Now it is plain beyond a doubt, that the solemn and awful character of God constitutes the sanctity of an oath. If he is considered by the person who takes it, as holy and sin-hating, as the unchangeable enemy of faithlessness and falsehood; if he is realized as a present and awful witness both of the oath and the subsequent conduct; if he is believed to be the future and dreadful avenger of perjury and unfaithfulness; then we cannot but suppose, that the

person who has thus sworn will deeply feel his obligation to be sincere and faithful; will with deep anxiety speak the truth exactly, or discharge the duties of the assumed office in the fear of God.

But if, on the contrary, the juror, whether in evidence or in office, regards God as an object of little importance; as being either too weak, or too regardless of rectitude, to take any serious concern in the moral conduct of his creatures; as destitute of sacredness of character, and hatred of sin; as indifferent to truth and falsehood, faithfulness and treachery; as willing to be mocked with impunity, and abused without resentment; as existing, only to be a mere caterer to the wants and wishes of his creatures, and a mere object of profanation and contempt: then plainly, the oath in which he is invoked can have little solemnity in the eyes, little influence on the heart, and little efficacy upon the conduct, of the juror. To every such person it will become a thing of course; a mere wind-and-weather incident, an empty mockery of solemn sounds on a thoughtless tongue. Its obligation he will neither feel nor see. The duties which it requires, he will not perform. There will therefore be no difference of conduct, in this case, *between him that sweareth*, and *him that sweareth not*.

But how evident is it, that persons who swear profanely, speedily lose all sense of the awful character of the Creator. From trifling with him in this wonderful manner, they soon learn to consider him as a mere trifler. From insulting him daily, they soon regard him as a proper object of insult. From mocking him with such impious effrontery, they speedily think of him in scarcely any other character, than that of a mere butt of mockery. Thus God is first degraded, in the view of the mind, by its own profaneness, and then intruded upon by perjury. He who swears profanely, will, in ordinary cases, soon swear falsely. Accordingly, customhouse oaths, proverbially false, are usually taken by profane men. Nay, such men have by their own perjuries rendered these oaths proverbially false. Oaths in evidence also, taken by such men, are justly regarded as lying under a general imputation; as contributing not a little to unhinge the confi-

dence of mankind in this their last reliance for truth and safety.

What is true of *profane cursing and swearing*, as to its corrupting power, is true of *irreverence in every form*. Disregard to God is the floodgate to all moral evil. He who enters upon this conduct, ought to consider himself as then entering upon a universal course of iniquity; and as then yielding himself as a slave to do the whole drudgery of Satan.

2dly. *Profaneness is a sin which is rapidly progressive.*

This truth cannot but be discerned extensively in the observations already made. Every act of profaning the name, perfections, works, word, and worship, of God, is obviously a bold, presumptuous attack upon this glorious Being. The sinner, having once dared so far, becomes easily more daring; and passes rapidly from one state of wickedness to another, until he becomes finally hardened in rebellion against his Maker. That most necessary fear of God, which is the great restraint upon sinful men, is speedily lost. The sinner is then left without a check upon his wickedness; and voluntarily induces upon himself a flinty obstinacy, which is a kind of reprobation on this side of the grave.

At the same time, the tongue is a most convenient instrument of iniquity, always ready for easy use. We cannot always sin with the hands; and are not always sufficiently gratified by mere sins of thought. Much as it is to be lamented, there is no small source of pleasure found by wicked men in communicating their sinful thoughts and feelings to each other. The slanderer is never satisfied with merely thinking over slander. The liar would soon be discouraged if he could not utter his lies. The profane swearer could hardly fail of becoming a reformed man, were it not for the pleasure, little as it is, which he finds in uttering his profaneness to others. The sins of the tongue are perpetrated, alike with ease and delight, every day; and in every place, where even a solitary individual can be found to listen. Hence transgressions of this kind are multiplied wonderfully. The thief steals, and the cheat defrauds, occasionally only. But the slanderer will slander every day. The liar utters falsehood unceasingly. The pro-

fane person swears and curses every where; and multiplies his iniquities *as the drops of the morning*. From the mind of such a person it is reasonably believed, that the Spirit of that God, *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, will, in a peculiar manner, withdraw his influence. Can it be rationally supposed, that this celestial visitant will stay with man, to be a witness of irreverence and profanation? Ought not every profane person to feel, that he is forcing away from himself those benevolent restraints upon his wickedness, which constitute his only security, and the only rational foundation of his hopes of eternal life?

3dly. *Profaneness, particularly that of the tongue, naturally introduces men to evil companions, and shuts them out from the enjoyment of those who are virtuous.*

All men love, all men seek, companions of their own character. Sinners herd with sinners instinctively. Virtuous men seek the company of those who are virtuous. Men of learning consort with men of learning; philosophers with philosophers; merchants, farmers, mechanics, and seamen, seek the company of those of their own class: the mere incidental circumstances of pursuing the same kind of business alluring them regularly to the society of each other. Still more powerful are moral inducements. This is a fact so extensively observed, that mankind have proverbially remarked, that *a man is known by the company which he keeps.*

Profane persons are shut out from the company of virtuous men by a variety of considerations. They totally disrelish the character of virtuous men; their pursuits, their sentiments, their conversation, and usually shun their society on this account. They also dread their inspection; and fear to have them witnesses of their own character, language, and opinions. For this reason, whenever they are in their company, they feel obliged to guard themselves; to bridle their tongues; and to take care, that their language and sentiments be not offensive to their companions, and dishonourable to themselves. This restraint, like all others, is painful; and they are unwilling to subject themselves to it whenever it can be avoided.

Virtue also is in its own nature awful to all sinners:

and proud as they are of themselves, and their sins, they cannot fail, in the hour of sober consideration, to feel their inferiority; and accordingly to be humbled, mortified, and abashed. Christ informs us, that *he who doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.* For the very same reason, profane persons, and other sinners, hate the company of religious men; because their character and conduct are a direct contrast to their own, and hold them out in a strong light of unworthiness and debasement. This contrast, few wicked men are willing to bear. Almost all of them shrink from it, as a wounded patient shrinks from the probe of the surgeon.

At the same time, virtuous persons loathe of course the company and conversation of all open and obstinate sinners. But profane persons are among the most open of all sinners. Their sin is ever on their lips, and continually proclaimed by their tongues. It is impossible therefore that their characters should not be known. Persons so directly opposed in feelings and pursuits, can never unite with that mutual agreement of heart or conversation, which is indispensable to the pleasantness, and even to the continuance, of familiar society. The virtuous man will, at the same time, find every thing lacking in such persons which he seeks for in company; whether it be pleasure or profit.

In addition to these things, his reputation becomes stained, and very deeply, if he consorts voluntarily with such companions. "Why," it will naturally be asked, "does he frequent such company?" "Certainly," it will be answered, "not for profit." The necessary inference is, therefore, that he frequents it for the sake of pleasure. Of course, he must find pleasure in sin; and in this peculiarly odious sin. But to find pleasure in any sin is a direct contradiction of his religious profession; a direct denial of his Christian character. In this manner [illegible] himself; he wounds the church; he wounds the cause of God. What Christian can be supposed to make such a sacrifice, for the sake of any thing which he can gain from sinful companions?

But the dangers from *evil* companions are continual, ex-

tremo, and in a sense infinite. They are found every moment, and in every place: especially in the haunts customarily frequented by men of this character. Here all the means of sinning are gathered together. *The companion of fools*, or wicked men, saith God, *shall be destroyed*.

The advantages of virtuous company, on the contrary, are great and unspeakable. Their sentiments and conduct are such as their consciences approve; and such as God approves. Their sentiments are all conformed to the Scriptures. Their conduct is the natural fruit of their sentiments: not perfect indeed; but sincere, amiable, and excellent. In this character is presented a powerful check upon sin, and a powerful support to virtue. No persons can give so alarming an exhibition of the evil, guilt, and danger, of sin, as they. No persons can place virtue in so alluring a light. They have felt the evils of sin, the foretastes of immortality, and the pleasures of holiness. They therefore can enter with the heart into both subjects; and can speak of both with feelings unknown to other men, and incapable of being known until they become virtuous. Hence good may be gained and evil avoided, by means of their company, by means peculiar to them, which is often unattainable or unavoidable in any other manner.

By shutting himself out from this company, the profane person therefore voluntarily relinquishes one of the chief blessings of life; one of the great means of securing life eternal. Nothing perhaps beside the worship of God, and a religious education, contributes more frequently, or more certainly, to bring men into the strait and narrow way; to keep them in it after they have once entered; or to aid and quicken them in the journey towards heaven. Nothing, on the other hand, seems more readily or regularly to withdraw them from danger, guilt, and ruin. All this good the profane person voluntarily casts away. Other sinners, of more favourable characters, often enjoy this blessing; and find it a blessing indeed. But the profane person carries with him the label of rejection; the mark of outlawry from virtuous society; a label, voluntarily worn; a mark, branded by himself.

At the same time he is consigned, in the same voluntary

manner, to the company of wicked men. Here virtue and hope are blasted together. Here all the curses opposed to the blessings above recited, multiply and thrive. Here his life is wasted, and his soul hazarded, assassinated, and destroyed for ever.

4thly. *Profaneness exposes men to the terrible denunciation of the text.*

The occasion on which this threatening was pronounced, the person by whom, and the manner and circumstances in which it was published to mankind, ought to render it peculiarly alarming to every man who is guilty of this sin. *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;* said the Creator of all things with an audible voice from Sinai, while the world was trembling beneath him; *for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.* This was the declaration of him who is thus profaned, and thus mocked; of him, who is an earwitness of all this profaneness and mockery; of him, by whom the wretch guilty of this transgression will be judged and condemned at the final day. The threatening is denounced against a single transgression of this nature. What then must be the guilt and the danger of profane persons, deformed as they usually are with transgressions scarcely numerable by men! What a chain of profanation, of oaths and curses, will every such person drag after him to the throne of God! How will he tremble at the retrospect; shrink from the dread tribunal, before his cause is heard; and realize the sentence of condemnation before it is pronounced!

The threatening here declared is a sentence gone forth beforehand from the tribunal of eternal justice against this particular transgression; a doom, already pronounced, and hastening to its execution, by the hand of him from whom no sinner can escape. It is a sentence which cannot be misunderstood; against a crime which cannot be doubted. Many sins are of such a nature, that the sinner may question the reality of his guilt. Here the crime is perfectly known, and the sentence absolutely decisive. The profane person, therefore, may consider himself as tried, judged, and condemned, already; judged and condemned from amidst the thunders and lightnings of the mount of God: and woe be to him who does not *believe and tremble.*

REMARKS.

1st. *These observations exhibit in a strong light the depravity of the human heart.*

In the progress of these discourses, it has been clearly evinced, that profaneness is a sin perpetrated in an almost endless variety of forms; that it is a sin attended with enormous guilt, and exposing the perpetrator to immense danger. It has also been shewn, that the inducements to it are very few, and very small; while the motives opposed to it are very many, and very great. Yet how evident is it, that this very sin is, and ever has been, practised by incomprehensible multitudes of mankind! The Jews were profane: the Mohammedans are profane: the Christian nations are profane: and the Heathen nations are, and ever were, profane to such gods as they acknowledged. Among all these nations, or, in other words, throughout the whole earth, and throughout the whole reign of time, innumerable *individuals* have ever been profane. Indeed, in one form or another, no man has been guiltless of that irreverence towards God in which the essence of profaneness consists. The evil therefore spreads over the world; and, in one form or another, attaches himself to every child of Adam.

How wonderful a specimen of human corruption is presented in the so-general profanation of the name of God, exhibited in light-minded cursing and swearing! How perfectly at a loss is reason for a motive to originate and explain this conduct! Why should the name of the Creator be treated with irreverence? Why should not any thing else be uttered by man, if we consider him merely as a rational being, without recurring at all to his moral and accountable character, rather than language of this nature? Certainly, it contributes not, in the least degree, to the advancement of any purpose cherished by the mind of the profane person: unless that purpose is mere profaneness. I know well, that *passion is often pleaded for the use of this language.* But why should passion prompt to profaneness? Anger, one would suppose, would naturally vent itself in expressions of resentment against the person who had provoked us. But this person is always a fellow-creature, a man like ourselves. In what way, or in what degree,

God concerned in this matter? What has the passion, what has the provocation, to do with him, his name, or his character? Why do we affront and injure him, because a creature, infinitely unlike him, has affronted and injured us? I know that *custom also is pleaded*, as an extenuation, and perhaps as an explanation, of this crime. But how came such a custom to exist? How came any rational being ever to think of profaning the name of God? How came any other rational being to follow him in this wickedness? Whence was it, that so many millions of those who ought to be rational beings, have followed them both? What end can it have answered? What honour, gain, or pleasure, can it have furnished? What taste can it have gratified? What desire, what affection, can it have indulged? What end can the profane person have proposed to himself?

Can any explanation be given of this conduct, except that it springs from love to wickedness itself? From a heart fixedly opposed to its Maker; pleased with affronting him; loving to abuse his character, and to malign his glorious agency? A heart in which sin is gratuitous; by which, in juster language, nothing is gained, much is plainly lost, and every thing is hazarded? What, beside the love of sinning; what, but the peculiar turpitude of the character; can be the source or the explanation of this conduct?

Thirdly, *These observations teach us the goodness of God in alarming mankind concerning this sin in so solemn a manner.*

The *guilt* of profaneness cannot be questioned; nor can there be any more question concerning the *danger* to which the perpetrator exposes himself. In such a situation, how kindly has the lawgiver of the universe warned mankind against the perpetration, by announcing to them, in this affecting manner, the evil to which it would expose them. He saw perfectly their tendency to this wickedness; and with infinite mercy has been pleased to provide those means for their safety which are best calculated to ensure it.

If a child were advancing towards the brow of a precipice;

how kindly would he and his parent regard a friend, who should announce to him his danger, direct him with sure guidance, and influence him with efficacious motives, to avoid it. The threatening contained in this command, and together with it all those which are found in the Scriptures, are calculated for this very purpose. They warn us of approaching guilt: they declare to us approaching danger. Thousands and millions of the human race have been actually saved by them from impending destruction. Terrible are they indeed to obstinate sinners, because they disturb them in their beloved course of sinning, and because they intend not to cease from sin. Still they are not the less mercifully given. They are the very means by which immense multitudes have been *plucked as brands out of the burning.*

3dly. *Let me warn all those who hear me to shun profaneness.*

To this end, *fix in your minds a solemn and controlling sense of the evil and danger of this sin.* Make this sense habitual in such a manner, that it may be always ready to rise up in the mind, and present itself before your eyes. Feel, that you will gain nothing here, and lose every thing hereafter.

Under the influence of these views, *keep the evil always at a great distance.* Mark the men who are profane; and avoid their company as you would avoid the plague. Shun the places where profaneness abounds, or where it may be expected to abound, as you would shun a quicksand. *Avoid them; pass not by them; turn from them; pass away.* Remember, that these places *are the way to hell; going down to the chambers of death.*

Unceasingly say to yourselves, *Thou God seest me.* Unceasingly say to yourselves, *The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.* Remember, that he is most mercifully disposed to be your *Father and everlasting Friend;* that he cannot be your friend, unless you regard him *with reverence and godly fear;* and that, if he be not your friend, you will throughout eternity be friendless, and helpless, and hopeless. What then will become of you?

Carefully avoid *mentioning his great name on any, except solemn occasions;* and *in any manner which is not strictly reverential.* Never speak, never think, of God, his Son, his Spirit, his name, his works, his word, or his institutions, without solemnity and awe. Never approach his house or his word without reverence. Prepare yourselves by solemn consideration and humble prayer for his worship. Shun all that language, which, though not directly profane, is merely a series of steps towards profaneness; and all those thoughts of sacred things which are tinctured with levity. At the same time, daily beseech him to preserve you; and let your unceasing prayer be, *Set a watch, O Lord! before my mouth: keep the door of my lips.*

4thly. *Let me solemnly admonish the profane persons in this assembly of their guilt and danger.*

You, unhappily for yourselves, are those, who *take the name of God in vain;* and of course are now, or soon will be, subjects of all the guilt and danger which I have specified. *Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord, Consider your ways.* Remember what you are doing; against whom your evil tongues are directed; who is the object of your contempt and mockery.

Ask yourselves what you gain; what you expect to gain; what you do not lose. Remember, that you lose your reputation, at least in the minds of all the wise and good, and all the blessings of their company and friendship; that you sacrifice your peace of mind; that you break down all those principles on which virtue may be grafted, and with them every rational hope of eternal life; that you are rapidly becoming more and more corrupted day by day; and that, with this deplorable character, you are preparing to go to the judgment. Think what it will be to swear and curse, to mock God and insult your Redeemer, through life; to carry your oaths and curses to a dying bed; to enter eternity with blasphemies in your mouths; and to stand before the final bar, when the last sound of profaneness has scarcely died upon your tongues!

If these considerations do not move you; if they do not make you tremble at the thought of what you are doing; if

they do not force you to a solemn pause in the career of iniquity; if they do not compel you to retrace your downward steps, and return, while it is in your power, to reformation and safety; I can only say, that you are hurried by an evil spirit to destruction; that you are maniacs in sin, on whom neither reason nor religion has any influence; and that you will soon find yourselves in the eternal dungeon of darkness and despair.

END OF VOL. III.

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